

23 March 2012

Army Public Health Weekly Update

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**Technical
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An Environmental Condition of Property (ECOP) investigation looks at the current and historical uses of a property and its adjoining properties as well as the potential for environmental contamination to decide whether the property is suitable for acquisition, construction, or divestment. This new **Technical Information Paper** is available in the **USAPHC Library**.

**What Army Leaders
Should Know about
Extreme
Conditioning
Programs**

This **public health notice** addresses the potential benefits and risks of extreme conditioning programs (such as CrossFit®, P90X®, Insanity®, and PT Pyramid) and ways to minimize the risks of such programs.

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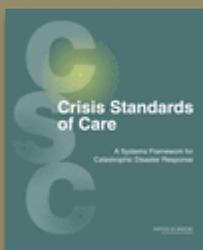
Kidney Stone Fact Sheet

A new **fact sheet** on the prevention of kidney stones is now available in the **USAPHC Library**.

Crisis Standards of Care: A Systems Framework for Catastrophic Disaster Response

The IOM has developed templates to guide the efforts of professionals and organizations responsible for Crisis Standards of Care planning and implementations.

Integrated planning for a coordinated response by state and local governments, EMS, health care organizations, and health care providers in the community is critical to successfully responding to disasters. The report also provides a foundation of underlying principles, steps needed to achieve implementation, and the pillars of the emergency response system.



U.S. MILITARY

Army health care in spotlight after Afghan shooting

22 March - As officials prepare charges against Staff Sgt. Robert Bales for his alleged killing spree in Afghanistan, concerns are growing about mental health screening for soldiers. The Army says it wants to help those with PTSD and other conditions, but the screening process has been described as an "assembly line," and soldiers who want psychological help have good reasons not to seek it out. [NPR](#)

New PT test ready, could be in place by October

18 March - More than 10,000 tests were conducted, mountains of data were compiled, and a few dialogues even devolved into debates — and now your new fitness test is ready for final approval. The plan retains the same five events first considered more than a year ago, but each had significant changes and challenges along the way. [Army Times](#)

Outpatient encounters associated with diagnostic codes for migraine and other types of headaches, active component, 1998-2010

February 2012 - This analysis examines incidence rates, prevalences, and outpatient encounters for migraine and other headache syndromes among active component members of the U.S. Armed Forces from 1998 through 2010. For both migraine and other headache syndromes, incidence rates, prevalences, and rates of outpatient encounters increased during the period. In 2010, 3.9 percent of male service members and 11.3 percent of females had at least one outpatient encounter for an episode of headache; rates were higher among females than males. Among service members ever diagnosed with migraine, 3 percent of men and 6 percent of women had more than 10 encounters for migraine; for other headache syndromes, the respective percentages were less than 1 percent. The introduction of new ICD-9 codes during the period had little effect on the coding practices for migraine, but did modestly affect the coding practices for other headache syndromes.

[Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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GLOBAL

Developing health-based pre-planning clearance goals for airport remediation following a chemical terrorist attack

13 February - In the event of a chemical terrorist attack on a transportation hub, post-event remediation and restoration activities necessary to attain unrestricted facility re-use and re-entry could require hours to multiple days. While timeframes are dependent on numerous variables, a primary controlling factor is the level of pre-planning and decision-making

Classified Version of the Weekly Update

An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the **SECRET** level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site: <http://phc.army.smil.mil> Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

To access this version, you will need a **SECRET** clearance and a SIPRNet account.

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completed prior to chemical release. What follows is the second of a two-part analysis identifying key considerations, critical information and decision criteria to facilitate post-attack and post-decontamination consequence management activities. [Human and Ecological Risk Assessment](#)

Ibuprofen may prevent altitude sickness, study says

20 March - The American College of Emergency Physicians released a study Tuesday of hikers who took ibuprofen before, during and after an ascent to high altitude. The odds of developing acute mountain sickness, or AMS, were far more likely in a placebo group than in those who took ibuprofen. Overall, 69 percent of people in the placebo group developed AMS, compared with just 43 percent in the ibuprofen group. And symptoms of AMS were less severe in people in the ibuprofen group who did develop the illness, according to study lead author Dr. Grant Lipman of Stanford University School of Medicine. "We did this study with the mountaineer or those who have limited vacation time in mind, but it certainly has applicability to the warfighter," Lipman said. [USA Today](#)

India's success fighting polio motivates rival Pakistan



20 March - Last month, India recorded a milestone in its effort to eradicate polio when it marked one year without any new infections. During the same year, Pakistan recorded 180 new polio cases, the most of any country. Pakistani authorities say national pride is now at stake for polio eradication and they are

hoping to overcome years of setbacks from natural disasters, misinformation and war. A polio vaccination team in Islamabad is visiting every house in a poor neighborhood of Afghan refugees to immunize every child against polio. They are part of a nationwide effort to administer the polio vaccine to more than 23 million children in a three-day period. [VOA News](#)

New TB drug regimen launched in Africa, South America

20 March - A global alliance of public and private health experts is marking this year's World TB Day March 24 by launching human clinical trials of a new anti-tuberculosis drug regimen in South Africa, Tanzania, and Brazil. Senior government officials in the United States have welcomed the trial, which promises to help control a disease that is becoming increasingly resistant to existing treatments. With nearly 4000 people dying of tuberculosis each day around the world, public health officials say TB control efforts urgently need new drugs. The clinical trials being launched by the TB Alliance - at eight sites in Africa and South America - will test a new drug regimen against this deadly and highly contagious respiratory infection. This new regimen deploys a new anti-bacterial drug that promises to kill the TB bacillus more quickly - in combination with a known, frequently used drug. Dr. Anthony Fauci - director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, says the regimen will be tested against both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant strains of TB. [VOA News](#)

Smoking is a drag on world economy: Tobacco Atlas



21 March - Smoking costs the world 1 to 2 percent of its gross domestic product each year and could kill about 1 billion people this century, authors of the fourth edition of the Tobacco Atlas said at the book's launch in Singapore. The economic losses include direct and indirect costs such as

healthcare spending for treating smoking-related illnesses and the value of lost productivity, say the authors of the book, which is published by the American Cancer Society. The cost of smoking could be even greater, as co-author Hana Ross said it was difficult to measure intangible costs like the suffering of family members or pain felt by patients. "During the 20th century, tobacco killed 100 million people. The estimate is that in the 21st century, tobacco will kill 1 billion people," lead author Michael Eriksen said at the launch of the book at a global health conference in Singapore. [Reuters](#)

Tuberculosis fears spur vaccine search

20 March - High numbers of people infected with tuberculosis in India, Russia, China and South Africa show the capacity to transmit drug-resistant strains of the deadly disease, a worrying sign that scientists say has spurred a global search to find a new vaccine. The World Health Organization estimates that India had 73,000 cases of multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis among notified cases, while China had 66,000, Russia 31,000 and South Africa 9,600, according to a report last year based on 2009 figures. But a global alliance of researchers and scientists hopes to tackle the tuberculosis challenge. On Tuesday, they unveiled a "blueprint" to develop a new vaccine that aims to disrupt transmission in hard-hit countries and communities. The group says the blueprint represents the first comprehensive plan for them to work together to test new vaccine candidates, and to coordinate fund-raising for expansive and expensive human trials. Experts estimate they will need at least \$1 billion over the next five years to bring viable vaccines through that pipeline. "We cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by either the costs or the obstacles," said Lucica Ditiu, executive secretary of Stop TB Partnership, an umbrella group of health groups that was involved in drafting the blueprint. "It is time to be bold and dare to do more." [The Wall Street Journal](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

22 March:

- Influenza cases increased slightly within the MHS compared to last week; influenza activity is low to moderate in overseas DoD laboratory surveillance networks.

- Influenza-like illness (ILI) incidence rates decreased from last week within the MHS across all regions.
- The influenza vaccination rate for the DoD (Active Duty component only) is 96%.
[AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 10 (4-10 March 2012), influenza activity remained elevated in some areas of the United States, but influenza-like-illness continued to be relatively low nationally. [FluView](#)

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview

During week 10 (5-11 March 2012), medium or higher intensity has been reported in 20 countries, decreasing trends in ten countries and increasing trends in only three countries. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 17 March 2012:

Influenza: There was an increase in influenza cases among basic training and DoD dependent surveillance populations in March 2012

Adenovirus

- Type 14 adenovirus is present at MCRD Parris Island.
- The proportion of FRI cases positive for adenovirus has markedly decreased since vaccine was reintroduced in November.

FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were moderately elevated NRTC Great Lakes. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 17 March: Influenza activity continues increasing but overall activity remains lower than last year. [USAPHC Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Egypt: Avian influenza situation, WHO update

19 March - The Ministry of Health and Population of Egypt has notified WHO of a new case of human infection with avian influenza A (H5N1) virus. The case is a 40 year-old female from Dakahlia Governorate. She developed symptoms on 6 March 2012, was hospitalised on 12 March 2012. She was in critical condition and received oseltamivir upon admission.

She died on 15 March 2012. The case was laboratory confirmed by the Central Public Health Laboratories (NIC). Investigations into the source of infection indicate that the case had exposure to sick backyard poultry. Of the 164 cases confirmed to date in Egypt, 58 have been fatal. [WHO](#)

India: Swine Flu is back — 129 cases, 12 deaths in last 20 days

22 March - ...As per data released by the Health Ministry today, in the first 21 days of March, a total of 129 positive Influenza-H1N1 cases have been reported, with a total of 12 deaths. Of these, 69 cases are from Maharashtra, 27 from Andhra Pradesh, 28 from Rajasthan and five from Karnataka. Out of 12 deaths, six have so far been reported from Maharashtra, five from Rajasthan and one from Andhra Pradesh. No death has so far been reported from Karnataka. [Daily News & Analysis](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Cardiff University food safety device to detect E. coli

20 March - A chemical which lights up fireflies is being used to develop a device for detecting salmonella, E. coli and listeria in contaminated food. Cardiff University's Bioluminescent Assay in Real-Time (Bart) tests quickly and simply for bacteria, something normally carried out in a laboratory. Food is placed inside Bart and the bacteria triggers luciferase, which is found in fireflies, to produce light. It is hoped to develop the system to test for diseases, including HIV-AIDS. Fireflies are best known for the light emitted from their abdomens. The yellows, greens and reds result from a chemical reaction known as bioluminescence, used to attract both mates and prey. Bart has been jointly invented by Prof Jim Murray of Cardiff University and Dr Laurence Tisi of technology company Lumora Ltd. Prof Murray said: "The food industry has been looking for dependable, fast and convenient microbiological testing for a long time." "Our system will allow workers to test a wide variety of foods in a simple system which uses the most sensitive molecular technology." "Portable versions of the device mean that it's now even possible to test farm animals in the food chain." "The food industry has been looking for dependable, fast and convenient microbiological testing for a long time". Cardiff University said Bart was a remarkably simple device. [BBC News](#)

Europe: Schmallenberg virus

19 March - With the lambing season coming to an end in some regions of Europe, the number of cases of Schmallenberg virus (SBV) being identified in sheep are declining, but cases in cattle are increasing, according to a recently updated outbreak assessment from Defra's International Disease Monitoring (IDM) team [See updated figures from all 8 SBV-affected counties in item 2.]. In its assessment, which was published on 11 Mar 2012, the team said that since its previous update of 22 Feb 2012, there has been a significant

increase in cases being reported from new areas of affected counties in England. This was not unexpected, it said, and all affected counties were within revised "at risk" zones identified as being in the pathway of windborne infected midges arriving from mainland Europe in the late summer and autumn of 2011. [ProMED-mail](#)

Taiwan to step up checks on beef imports over food safety fears surrounding a controversial additive

20 March - Taiwan will tighten checks on beef imports over food safety fears surrounding a controversial additive used to promote lean meat, officials said Sunday. Several shipments of imported beef have been pulled from Taiwan's shelves this year after they were found to be treated with ractopamine. And plans to lift a ban on ractopamine-treated US beef recently sparked protests from farmers, who fear the local meat industry could be undermined. Beginning Tuesday, imports of beef products from the United States, Canada, Australia, Panama and Nicaragua will be tested shipment by shipment, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said. The move is aimed at calming the fears of local consumers who have shunned buying meat products, either imported or locally produced. Observers say the plan to lift the ban on ractopamine-treated beef is aimed to facilitate stalled trade talks with the United States, a key trading partner and arms supplier of the politically isolated island. "Before the existing law can be amended, all meat products treated with lean meat drugs are banned," Tsai Shu-chen, an FDA official, said. Taiwan, China and the European Union ban such drugs because of possible human health risks, but 26 countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia and Brazil, have declared the product safe. [NY Daily News](#)

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WELLNESS

Blood pressure variance between arms points to heart risk

20 March - Calculating the difference in blood pressure readings taken from the left and right arms might help predict a patient's odds of dying from heart disease, a new study suggests. Researchers found that people with high blood pressure whose blood pressure varies significantly between each arm are at higher risk of cardiovascular death over 10 years. The study supports "inter-arm difference as a simple indicator of increased cardiovascular risk," say a team led by Dr. Andrew Gould, of the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry in Plymouth, England. [Medline Plus](#)

Smoking deaths triple over decade: tobacco report



21 March - Tobacco-related deaths have nearly tripled in the past decade and big tobacco firms are undermining public efforts that could save millions, a report led by the health campaign group the World Lung Foundation (WLF) said on Wednesday. In the report, marking the tenth anniversary of its first Tobacco Atlas, the WLF and the American Cancer Society said if current trends continue, a billion people will die from tobacco use and exposure this century - one person every six seconds. [Reuters](#)

Studies find an aspirin a day can keep cancer at bay

20 March - Three new studies published on Wednesday added to growing scientific evidence suggesting that taking a daily dose of aspirin can help prevent, and possibly treat, cancer. Previous studies have found that daily aspirin reduces the long-term risk of death due to cancer, but until now the shorter-term effects have been less certain - as has the medicine's potential in patients already diagnosed with cancer. The new studies, led by Peter Rothwell of Britain's Oxford University, found that aspirin also has a short-term benefit in preventing cancer, and that it reduces the likelihood that cancers will spread to other organs by about 40 to 50 percent. "These findings add to the case for use of aspirin to prevent cancer, particularly if people are at increased risk," Rothwell said. "Perhaps more importantly, they also raise the distinct possibility that aspirin will be effective as an additional treatment for cancer - to prevent distant spread of the disease." [Reuters](#)

U.S.: New anti-smoking ad campaign features personal profiles of tobacco victims

14 March - The federal government is launching a new anti-tobacco campaign that features personal descriptions and photographs of people who've suffered grievous effects from smoking, often before the age of 50. The ostensible purpose of the campaign, called "Tips from Former Smokers," is to give smokers practical advice on how to quit their habit. Promotional materials released a day in advance of the formal launch, however, suggests it is also an up-close, voyeuristic look at victims of disease. [Washington Post](#)

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USAFRICOM

Kenya: Conflict fears as wildfires destroy pasture, cause displacement



20 March - Wildfires have destroyed large tracts of grassland in northern Kenya, giving rise to fears of conflict between pastoralist communities amid an already serious food security crisis. "In the areas we have managed to visit, the loss of vegetation is large, at least 20,000 hectares," said an officer with the Kenya Forest service in the town of Wajir, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak publicly. He said an overall assessment to establish the total level of destruction had yet to be conducted. According to Mohamed Wako, an elder, tension is rising along the Isiolo, Garissa and Wajir borders with residents accusing each other of causing the fire. [IRIN](#)

Kenya: Smartphones improve Kenyan disease surveillance

13 March - Smartphones show promise in disease surveillance in the developing world because it is faster, cheaper and more accurate than traditional paper survey methods to gather disease information after the initial set-up cost. Smartphone data was more reliable than paper, according to the findings of the Kenya Ministry of Health and researchers in Kenya for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Survey data collected with smartphones in the study had fewer errors and were more quickly available for analyses than data collected on paper. For example, smartphone data were uploaded into the database within eight hours of collection compared with an average of 24 days for paper-based data to be uploaded, in a study released March 12 by CDC. [Government Health IT](#)

Nigeria: Lassa fever spreads

16 March - The Minister for Health, Prof. Onyebuchi Chukwu, has said that the Lassa fever epidemic has so far spread to 16 states across the federation. Chukwu said this on Friday in Umuahia when he accompanied the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina, to the launch of Pro-Vitamin A cassava varieties at the National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike. Speaking with newsmen, he said that the scourge was not strange in Nigeria, pointing out that "Edo State has long been experiencing it." According to him, "what we are witnessing now is the outbreak of the epidemic in some other parts of the country." He explained that the disease "goes with hot weather" and unhygienic environment, leading to the breeding of rodents. Chukwu said that the rodents, the vectors of the disease, contracted the disease from decomposed grains often deposited within the environment. He said the ministry was currently sensitising Nigerians to "environmental control and personal hygiene" as part of the measures to check the disease. The minister explained that the Federal Government had initiated a number of measures, including the establishment of three laboratories across the country, to arrest the situation. [All Africa](#)

Republic of Congo: Mpila Military Munitions Depot Explosion

22 March - On the 4th of March 2012 a series of blasts at the Mpila military munitions depot sent shock waves through the capital city of the Republic of Congo, Brazzaville. The disaster took place at three sites: the first, where the munitions depot was located, includes the tank area, which was destroyed at 98 percent; the second area was destroyed at 90 percent and the third area suffered extensive damage. The explosion resulted in the killing of more than 200 people and injured more than 2300, many more are left homeless. The cause of the explosion is suspected to have been an electrical short circuit. Investigations are however still on going... While the government planned to have the military camp relocated to a place outside of the city, the recent explosion demonstrates that it was simply too little too late. Hospitals battle to treat the large numbers of injured victims, and a mass burial for over 200 deceased victims of the blast was conducted by the government of the

Republic of Congo, and the families of the victims. Homes, churches, businesses and government buildings were all flattened during the explosion and the shock waves that followed. [All Africa](#)

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USCENTCOM

Arab region spends \$5.5 billion yearly in fight against diabetes

17 March - Amid current pace of population growth coupled with massive economic development, the need for a better and comprehensive healthcare system is essential as diabetes - often associated with obesity - as are other chronic diseases, become pandemic. In the Arab region alone, \$5.5 billion are spent on diabetes healthcare every year, representing 14 percent of the total healthcare budget for the MENA region, said Dr. Wail Al-Qasim, General Manager, Saudi Arabia, Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD). In an interview with the Saudi Gazette, he said in Saudi Arabia, more than SR12 billion are spent every year on diabetes. On the global scale, he noted that healthcare expenditure on type 2 diabetics is expected to increase from \$376 billion in 2010, to \$490 billion in 2030. Developed countries spend from 2.5 to 15 percent of their annual healthcare budget on diabetes. He further said families also suffer from the economic burden of diabetes as families with diabetic members spend anywhere from 15 percent to 25 percent of their monthly income on diabetes healthcare. [Zawya](#)

Egypt: Health system needs cash injection



19 March - Egypt's public health system is in disarray and needs to be better funded if it is to reach more people and provide more effective health care, say experts. "A lack of equipment, nurses, and doctors has rendered the nation's hospitals totally dysfunctional," said Khairy Abdel Dayem, chairman of Egypt's

Medical Association. "The few patients who get [decent] medical treatment have to pay for it." The country has a very high prevalence of chronic diseases, including liver infections, cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma, according to the [World Health Organization](#). It also has higher infection rates for invasive medical, dental, or paramedic procedures than many other countries with comparable socio-economic conditions and hygiene standards, says WHO. [IRIN](#)

Yemen crisis leaves 5 million people in need of emergency food aid, says WFP

14 March - Around one-fifth of the population of Yemen is in need of emergency food aid, the World Food Programme (WFP) said on Wednesday. A WFP survey on food security among 8,000 households in 19 of the country's 21 governorates concluded that

approximately 5 million people – about 22% of the population – are facing severe hunger, double the 2009 number and above the threshold at which food aid is required. A further five million are moderately food insecure and at risk of experiencing further food shortages.

[Guardian](#)

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USEUCOM

Europe's TB battle

20 March – European health services are struggling to treat TB successfully as drug-resistant strains spread, according to the World Health Organization. The continent was urged to step up efforts to eliminate the disease in an assessment published for World TB Day on Saturday. Cases of TB have declined slowly across Europe but treatment success rates have also fallen, WHO says. Some 309,648 cases were reported in 2010, a 2.9 per cent reduction on the previous year. But health services now report treatment success rates of 68.7 per cent for new cases and 47.6 per cent for patients with recurrent disease. Rates of TB are highest in eastern Europe - but WHO urged western countries with large urban centres such as London, Rotterdam, Barcelona and Milan to take on the "final challenge" of eliminating the disease. Marc Sprenger, director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, said: "In this setting, key populations – like people who inject drugs, homeless people and migrants – are disproportionately affected by TB. [ENGLEMED Health News](#)

Greece: Heroin addicts to get free condoms amid HIV spike

20 March - Greece will issue free condoms and syringes to heroin addicts to halt an alarming rise in new HIV cases, the health ministry said on Tuesday... The state organisation against drugs (Okana) and volunteer groups will distribute 30,000 condoms and 10,000 syringes as part of the initiative to be initially launched in Athens. Greece's top health watchdog in November warned that new HIV-positive cases had increased by 52.7 percent from 2010, a rise blamed on prostitution -- which increasingly draws on undocumented migrants -- and intravenous drug use. The centre for disease control and prevention (Keelpno) said over 800 new cases had been recorded until October 2011, over a third among homosexual men. Among heroin users, the increase was 1,250 percent in a year, Keelpno said. [AFP](#)

Spain: Ongoing measles outbreak in Elche, 29 January to 9 March 2012

15 March - On 29 January 2012, the first case of measles in Elche, Spain, since 2001 was notified through the epidemiological surveillance system of the Valencian Community. As of 9 March, 109 cases have been notified. The outbreak started in a neighbourhood where the

vaccination coverage of the population is inadequate. This report highlights the need to vaccinate the susceptible population and also points to the importance of developing coordinated measures between public health centres and hospital preventive services.

[Eurosurveillance](#)

United Kingdom: Oral cancer cases on the increase, Cancer Research UK

15 March – Oral cancer cases are increasing, with 6,200 this year, figures from Cancer Research UK show, with two-thirds of cases in men. This compares with 4,400 cases a decade ago. Most cases are linked to smoking, but alcohol misuse and the human papillomavirus (HPV) infection through oral sex have been linked to the rise. Experts said warning signs included mouth ulcers and red or white patches in the mouth that would not heal. Up to eight out of 10 people in the UK are infected with HPV at some point in their lives, though most cases are harmless. But high-risk strains of HPV are linked to oral cancers, as well as cervical and other genital cancers. [BBC News](#)

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USNORTHCOM

Mexico: 7.4 quake shakes Mexico, 100s of homes damaged

20 March - A strong 7.4-magnitude earthquake hit Mexico on Tuesday, shaking central and southern parts of the country, sending a pedestrian bridge crashing atop a transit bus and swaying high-rises in Mexico City. At least one building in the capital appeared on the verge of collapse. More than 60 homes were damaged near the epicenter in Ometepec in southern Guerrero state, though there were no reports of death or serious injury. Fear and panic spread as a less powerful, magnitude-5.1 aftershock was also felt in the capital, where there were also no reports of deaths. Other aftershocks were felt around the borders of Oaxaca and Guerrero states close to the epicenter. [Associated Press](#)

Northeast U.S. should brace for spike in Lyme disease, expert

20 March - The northeastern United States may see a significant increase in cases of Lyme disease this spring, an expert warns. The reason is that oak trees produced relatively few acorns this year, part of a normal cycle of boom and bust years for the acorn crop. But the small crop means trouble for the white-footed mouse, which feeds on the acorns. "We had a boom in acorns, followed by a boom in mice. And now, on the heels of one of the smallest acorn crops we've ever seen, the mouse population is crashing," Richard Ostfeld, a disease ecologist at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, N.Y., said in an institute

news release. What does that have to do with Lyme disease? Mice are the preferred host for black-legged ticks, which transmit Lyme disease. Black-legged ticks need a bloodmeal at three different stages -- as larvae, as nymphs and as adults. As of the spring, the larval ticks that fed on 2011's large mouse population will be looking for their nymphal meal. "This spring, there will be a lot of *Borrelia burgdorferi*-infected black-legged ticks in our forests looking for a blood meal. And instead of finding a white-footed mouse, they are going to find other mammals -- like us," Ostfeld added. *Borrelia burgdorferi* is the bacterium that causes Lyme disease. [Medline Plus](#)

U.S.: Gut infections are growing more lethal

19 March - Gastrointestinal infections are killing more and more people in the United States and have become a particular threat to the elderly, according to new data released last week. Deaths from the infections more than doubled from 1999 to 2007, to more than 17,000 a year from 7,000 a year, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) reported. Of those who died, 83 percent were over age 65. Two thirds of the deaths were caused by a bacterium, *Clostridium difficile*, which people often contract in hospitals and [nursing homes](#), particularly when they have been taking [antibiotics](#). The bacteria have grown increasingly virulent and resistant to treatment in recent years. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: Insects behind Chagas disease are feeding on humans in the U.S.



20 March - Insects that are part of a family of bugs that transmit Chagas disease are well-established and feeding on human blood in certain regions of the United States, a new study finds. What remains a mystery, however, is why the insects infect millions in Central and South America with Chagas disease, a serious condition that can lead to life-threatening digestive and heart problems, yet few such cases have been documented in the United States. So far, researchers have documented only seven cases of Chagas in the United States. "The basic message is that the bug is out there, it's feeding on humans, and it carries the parasite, so there may be greater potential for humans to have the disease in the United States than previously thought," Lori Stevens, a biologist at the University of Vermont, said in a university news release. "Very likely, with climate change they will shift further north and the range of some species will extend." In the study, which was published online March 14 in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, researchers collected specimens from the Reduviid family of insects in Arizona and California. [Medline Plus](#)

U.S.: Trends in tuberculosis, 2011

23 March - In 2011, a total of 10,521 new tuberculosis (TB) cases were reported in the United States, an incidence of 3.4 cases per 100,000 population, which is 6.4% lower than the rate in 2010. This is the lowest rate recorded since national reporting began in 1953... Despite the continued decline in U.S. TB cases and rates since 1993, the 6.4% decline from 2010 to 2011 to a rate of 3.4 per 100,000 falls short of the 2010 goal of TB elimination (less than one case per 1,000,000) set in 1989 (4). If current efforts are not improved or

expanded, TB elimination is unlikely before the year 2100. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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Asia: Asbestos - deadly but not yet banned

21 March - Even though public health experts recognize how deadly asbestos can be, its use is on the rise in the construction industry throughout Asia, according to the US Geological Survey. The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) estimates some 107,000 workers die annually from asbestos-related diseases, out of 125 million people who encounter it in the workplace. The European Union, Australia, Japan, South Korea and an increasing number of countries have outlawed it, according to London-based NGO [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat](#) (IBAS). The asbestos industry paid US\$70 billion over four decades in damages and litigation costs in the USA, where asbestos is regulated but not banned, according to the Washington, D.C.-based [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#) (ICIJ). But despite the ban, asbestos is still an important component of the construction and manufacturing industries, said Sugio Furuya, coordinator of the Tokyo-based Asia Ban Asbestos Network (A-BAN). "In fact, Asia and the Middle East consume the asbestos that is not used elsewhere any more," he added. [IRIN](#)

Australia: Whooping cough beats vaccine

21 March – Dangerous new strains of whooping cough bacteria are evading Australia's vaccine against the disease and entrenching a four-year epidemic that could spread overseas, Sydney scientists have found in research that raises questions about the national immunisation program. Microbiologists from the University of NSW have found variants of the pertussis bacteria with a particular genetic signature have increased to 86 per cent of all samples taken from infected people after a continuing disease epidemic began in 2008. Although the strains were present in Australia as early as 2000, they accounted for only 31 per cent of all samples collected between 2000 and 2007 – suggesting they have flourished alongside the current vaccine against the potentially fatal respiratory infection. The strains have "swept across Australia during the epidemic period" according to Ruiting Lan, from the school of biotechnology and biomolecular sciences. More than 13,000 whooping cough cases were diagnosed in 2011 – an all-time high. The Children's Hospital at Westmead treated 76 children for whooping cough in 2011, up from 47 the previous year. The Sydney Children's Hospital treated 34 children in 2011, up from 16 the previous year. [The Sydney Morning Herald](#)

China: Air pollution could become China's biggest health threat, expert warns



16 March - Air pollution will become the biggest health threat in China unless the government takes greater steps to monitor and publicise the dangers of smog, the country's leading respiratory disease specialist warned this week. Lung cancer and cardiovascular illnesses are already rising and could get worse in the future because of factory emissions, vehicle exhausts and cigarette smoke, Zhong Nanshan, the president of the China Medical Association, told the Guardian... "Air pollution is getting worse and worse in China, but the government data showed it was getting better and better. People don't believe that. Now we know it's because they didn't measure some pollutants," said Zhong. "If the government neglects this matter, it will be the biggest health problem facing China." [Guardian](#)

China reports 900,000 cases of active TB in 2011

19 March - About 900,000 cases of active tuberculosis (TB) were discovered and treated in 2011, including 423,000 infectious cases, the Ministry of Health (MOH) announced Monday at a press conference. Xiao Donglou, a health inspector from the MOH, said at the press conference that China improved its ability to prevent and control TB last year, focusing on HIV/TB co-infections and cases of TB among the country's migrant population. Xiao said 1,701 HIV/TB co-infections were reported last year, as well as 51,682 cases of TB among the migrant population. [Xinhua](#)

Vietnam: Hand, foot, mouth disease kills 11, sickens 12,000 children already this year

14 March - Vietnam says an ongoing outbreak of a common childhood virus has killed 11 and sickened more than 12,000 mostly under 3-year-olds this year. The Health Ministry says the infection rate of the hand, foot and mouth disease from January 1 to March 9 was seven times higher than the same period a year ago and is expected to rise further in coming months. [Washington Post](#)

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Venezuela: Malaria

18 March - Epidemiological bulletin number 9 of the Health Ministry for the week 26 Feb to 3 Mar 2012 shows Bolivar state has an epidemic with 876 of the 932 malaria cases [reported] nationwide. The report of the national health authority indicates an increase of 5 percent in outbreaks of the disease in Sifontes municipality, which recorded the highest

number of infected, with 669 cases of malaria. Similarly, establishing an increased incidence of *Plasmodium falciparum* in the region, taking into account that of the 165 cases reported in the country 163 were recorded in Bolivar state, while mixed plasmodium species comprise 24 of the 27 diagnosed nationally. [ProMED-mail](#)

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The *Army Public Health Weekly Update* is published by the Health Information Operations Program, Deputy Chief of Staff for Communication, United States Army Public Health Command.

