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Army Public Health Weekly Update

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Contents

U.S. MILITARY

- Army moves to act fast on battlefield brain injuries
- Malaria in the U.S. Armed Forces: A persistent but preventable threat
- Military linked to rise in HIV cases in Fairbanks, Alaska
- More troops on smokeless tobacco after deployment
- National Guard deployment may sometimes trigger alcohol abuse
- Parents blast Army response to rabies death

GLOBAL

- Evolution of staph 'superbug' traced between humans and livestock
- Obesity rates rise, threaten health in OECD nations

INFLUENZA

- Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary
- CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview
- Flu activity continues late-season climb
- Flu shots for pregnant moms may protect babies
- Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update
- PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA
- Bird flu may not be so deadly after all, new analysis claims
- Egypt: Avian influenza situation, WHO update
- H3N2v pandemic potential
- Indonesia: Avian influenza situation, WHO update

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

- ECDC launches toolkit for foodborne, waterborne outbreaks
- How using antibiotics in animal feed creates superbugs
- United gives break to pet owners on PCS moves
- U.S.: Raw milk causes most illness from dairy products, CDC

Army Industrial Hygiene News

A new issue of the Army Industrial Hygiene News and Regulatory Summary includes articles on the assessment of reproductive risks in the workplace, radon found in military housing, and patient handling and musculoskeletal injuries.



WELLNESS

- Daily diet soda may increase risk of heart attack, stroke: study
- Fewer melanoma deaths in counties with more dermatologists
- Heart attack with no chest pain more likely in women
- Migraines may raise the risk of depression in women
- Monitoring your health with mobile devices

USAFRICOM

- Burundi: Rain-displaced need urgent aid
- Congo: Cholera "continues spreading"
- Nigeria: Lassa fever kills 40
- South Sudan: High hopes for defeating "neglected" diseases

USCENTCOM

- Iraq: Call to adopt modern irrigation techniques
- Syria: Worrying signs for food security

USEUCOM

- Balkans lurch from killer blizzards to icy floods
- Measles cases in Europe topped 30,000 again in 2011
- Scotland: Mumps
- United Kingdom: 210,000 people face alcohol death risk, warn doctors

USNORTHCOM

- All U.S. adults should get whooping cough shot
- U.S.: EPA dioxin assessment raises red flag for some
- U.S.: FDA continues to fight drug shortages
- U.S.: Hepatitis C linked to more deaths than HIV

USPACOM

- Burma: Clinics turn away HIV, TB patients
- Radiation detected 400 miles off Japan coast
- Vietnam: Hand-foot-mouth disease outbreaks

USSOUTHCOM

- Brazil: Gram negative bacilli, MDR

U.S. MILITARY

Army moves to act fast on battlefield brain injuries

20 February - ...The problem is, most soldiers — and many of their leaders — *are* a bit stubborn like Dollman. Soldiers don't like being taken away from their unit, especially for an injury they can't see. The Army, in particular, has had a mixed record treating soldiers for TBI. Now it is trying to spot the injury close to the battlefield and get soldiers out of the fight. Medics began carrying a laminated quiz that tests a soldier's ability to concentrate,

Disease Surveillance Workshop: 28 February

USAPHC and Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center will host the first of monthly workshops for those who conduct disease surveillance within their community. The target audience includes public health nurses, community health nurses, epi-techs, preventive medicine technicians and anyone else who may be responsible for disease surveillance. Training topics will include: DRSi, ESSENCE, ARD surveillance, influenza surveillance, and outbreak recognition, as well as strategies on how to efficiently find and confirm reportable medical events.

Participants can attend either session of the first training on 28 February at 0900 hours EST and 1500 hours EST. The workshop will cover how to use the new reporting and graphing functions within DRSi. Those who wish to participate can connect via DCO and telecon.

[More information](#)

but they soon found that soldiers were memorizing the answers. Now the medics carry several different versions of the quiz. But that touches on a challenge with TBI: how to diagnose it. The symptoms aren't always as obvious as Dollman's — sometimes there aren't any obvious symptoms at all. "Everyone wants a pregnancy test for TBI," says Maj. Gen. Richard Thomas. The surgeon has just finished a tour as lead medical adviser to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. He says someday a blood test or brain scan may be able to indicate whether a soldier has TBI; the Army is researching both. But Thomas says those tests could be years away. "While that's working, that takes time. What are we going to do immediately? Immediately we gotta identify these guys as soon as we can, get them out of the fight," he says. "Because we know that for concussion, the best thing to do immediately is take them away from the insult, rest them, let their brain recover." [NPR](#)

Malaria in the U.S. Armed Forces: A persistent but preventable threat

January 2012 - ...This issue of the MSMR reports the latest trends in malaria among U.S. military members. Of particular note, the 91 cases of malaria that were considered acquired in Afghanistan in 2011 was the highest number recorded among U.S. military members serving in that country in the last nine years; moreover, the Afghanistan-acquired cases constituted 73 percent of all documented malaria cases last year. Unfortunately, after ten years of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, and despite the availability of effective prevention measures and a long organizational history of fighting the disease, malaria remains a threat to U.S. forces and their operations in Afghanistan. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Military linked to rise in HIV cases in Fairbanks, Alaska

22 February - A recent spike in HIV infections in Fairbanks has been linked to military men finding sex partners online, according to newly released public health data. The outbreak involves nine cases of HIV infection between Jan. 1, 2011, and Jan. 31, 2012, the state Department of Health and Social Services reported in a bulletin issued Tuesday. From 2007 through 2010, the number of HIV cases reported in the Fairbanks area was fairly stable at two to four a year, so "this is a very unusual spike," said Susan Jones, a state epidemiology official. Of the nine people infected in 2011, eight were men who had sex with other men, according to the agency. Seven were either in the U.S. Army in Fairbanks or had sexual partners in the military. Most were young-- four were under the age of 20. Seven of the men reported meeting sex partners online. Six had tested negative for HIV in the 13 months before their diagnoses. [The Bellingham Herald](#)

More troops on smokeless tobacco after deployment

22 February - U.S. troops sent to Iraq or Afghanistan are more likely to start a smokeless tobacco habit than their comrades who stay home -- especially if they see combat, a new study finds. The findings, reported in the journal *Addiction*, follow other studies that have tied deployment and combat to health risks, including higher rates of smoking and drinking. "This adds to the list of things we're learning are associated with combat," said lead researcher Dr. Eric D.A. Hermes, of the Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven,

Classified Version of the Weekly Update

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<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.

Links

[A-Z Index](#)

[About USAPHC](#)

[Army Public Health and Health Information Weekly Update Archives](#)

[Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

[Medical Threat Briefings \(AKO\)](#)

[Request USAPHC Services](#)

[USAPHC Library](#)

[USAPHC Homepage](#)

[USAPHC Training](#)

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Connecticut. It's not fully clear why some troops take up smokeless tobacco after deployment. But Hermes suspects stress is involved. [Reuters](#)

National Guard deployment may sometimes trigger alcohol abuse



20 February - U.S. National Guard soldiers have a high risk of developing alcohol abuse during and after deployment, and this risk is associated with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, researchers say. The new study included 963 members of the Ohio Army National Guard who said they never abused alcohol prior to active duty. Between June 2008 and February 2009, nearly 12 percent -- 113 of the soldiers -- reported alcohol abuse disorder that first occurred during or after deployment. Among these soldiers, 35 reported depression (31 percent), 23 reported post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD (20 percent), and 15 reported both conditions (13 percent) during the follow-up period. Surprisingly, alcohol abuse was uncommon among the small number of soldiers who had a history of PTSD or depression before deployment, according to the researchers. [Medline Plus](#)

Parents blast Army response to rabies death

22 February - ...Shumaker's death has shaken the Army medical community and spurred action. Col. Steven Cersovsky, director of epidemiology and disease surveillance at U.S. Army Public Health Command, said the military already tries to educate soldiers, make treatment available and issue orders that troops avoid feral animals. Now, Army epidemiologists are examining what more can be done in the wake of Shumaker's tragic death, he said. Army Public Health Command's initial response was to identify, evaluate and treat anyone else exposed to rabies or a feral animal downrange from mid-August until a few weeks ago. Roughly 9,000 previously unidentified people, many of them soldiers, came forward to be evaluated, Cersovsky said. That in part has led Army epidemiologists to devise a lessons-learned report to inform stronger new policies. [Army Times](#)

[top of page...](#)

GLOBAL

Evolution of staph 'superbug' traced between humans and livestock

21 February - A strain of the potentially deadly antibiotic-resistant bacterium known as MRSA has jumped from livestock to humans, according to a new study involving two Northern Arizona University researchers. Paul Keim, Regents' professor and director of NAU's Center for Microbial Genetics and Genomics, and Lance Price, NAU faculty member and director of the Center for Food Microbiology and Environmental Health at the

Translational Genomics Research Institute, collaborated with scientists at 20 institutions around the world on the study recently published in the online journal mBio. [Science Daily](#)

Obesity rates rise, threaten health in OECD nations



21 February - More people in developed countries are overweight or obese than ever before, dooming them to years of ill health, pushing up healthcare costs and piling more pressure on health systems, a report by the OECD found on Tuesday. The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found obesity rates vary widely from a low of 4 percent in [Japan](#) and Korea to 30 percent or more in the United States and Mexico. But in more than half of the 34 OECD countries, at least one in two people is now overweight or obese, and rates are projected to rise further. In some countries, two out of three people will be obese within 10 years, the report said. [Reuters](#)

[top of page...](#)

INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

22 February:

- Influenza activity remains low across all overseas DoD laboratory surveillance networks; with the exception of moderate influenza activity in South America and East Africa with co-circulation of A/H1, A/H3, and B.
- 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 6 (5-11 February 2012), influenza activity in the United States continued to increase. [FluView](#)

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

During week 6 (6-12 February 2012), medium influenza activity was reported by 13 countries and increasing trends by 17 countries. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Flu activity continues late-season climb

17 February – Flu activity in the United States, Canada, and parts of Europe continues to increase, but for the most part, levels of both mild and severe illness are low compared with past flu seasons, the World Health Organization (WHO) said today. Activity appears to have peaked in a few Northern Hemisphere locations, such as some countries in Western Europe, North Africa, and northern China, according to the WHO. The H3N2 virus is still dominating in most parts of the world except for Mexico, which is seeing mainly the 2009 H1N1 virus, and China and its neighbors, which are reporting mostly influenza B. The WHO said that although the 2009 H1N1 virus is circulating at low levels in most parts of the world, in Canada it is having a greater impact on children younger than 5 compared with seniors and in Europe it is responsible for a greater portion of hospitalizations for severe infections.

[CIDRAP](#)

Flu shots for pregnant moms may protect babies



21 February - Giving flu shots to pregnant women seems to reduce their risk of having a baby that is small for its gestational age, a new study has found. Babies who are small for their gestational age have an increased risk of health problems and other issues throughout their lives. The study included 340 pregnant women in Bangladesh who were divided into two groups -- 170 who received the flu vaccine and 170 who received a different vaccine that does not protect against the flu. All of the women were in their third trimester. When the seasonal influenza virus was circulating in the population, the flu vaccine group had fewer babies who were small for their gestational age than the other group -- about 26 percent versus 45 percent. The percentage of small-for-gestational-age births was similar in both groups when the influenza virus was dormant, according to the study published Feb. 21 in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*). [Medline Plus](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 18 February 2012:

An increase in influenza cases among southern California DoD dependents and civilians was identified near US-Mexico border in February 2012.

Adenovirus

- Vaccination against types 4 and 7 adenovirus was instituted at all basic training centers by mid-November 2011 (week 45).
- The proportion of FRI cases positive for adenovirus has markedly decreased since vaccine was reintroduced.
- Type 14 adenovirus is present at MCRD Parris Island.

[FRI surveillance](#) at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were at or below expected values. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Bird flu may not be so deadly after all, new analysis claims

23 February - Bird flu may be far less lethal to people than the World Health Organization's assessment of a death rate topping 50 percent, scientists said on Thursday in a finding that adds fuel to the heated controversy over publication of bird flu research. Scientists led by virologist Peter Palese of Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York argue in an analysis published in the online edition of the journal *Science* that the WHO, a U.N. agency, is calculating the death rate using an estimate of human bird flu cases that is simply too low. Palese and his colleagues did not offer a specific death rate for people infected by bird flu. But based on figures cited in their analysis, the rate appears to be under 1 percent. The WHO stood by its calculations and some experts criticized the Palese team's findings, saying they were based on misleading data. As of Thursday, the WHO counts 586 cases of people infected by bird flu. Of those, 346 died, for a fatality rate of 59 percent... The important scientific journals *Science* and *Nature* are holding off on publishing papers on two experiments that created mutant, more contagious forms of the H5N1 bird flu virus. The delay comes at the request of a U.S. biosecurity panel for fear the research could fall into the wrong hands and be used to create a pandemic that might kill tens of millions of people. [The Baltimore Sun](#)

Egypt: Avian influenza situation, WHO update

22 February - 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 45 year-old female from Menofia governorate. She developed symptoms on 10 February 2012, received oseltamivir treatment on 17 February 2012 and is still recovering. The case was laboratory confirmed by the Central Public Health Laboratories; a National Influenza Center of the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network on 18 February 2012. Epidemiological investigation into the source of infection indicate that the case had exposure to backyard poultry. Of the 160 cases confirmed to date in Egypt, 55 have been fatal. [WHO](#)

H3N2v pandemic potential

22 February - A new study says flu viruses of swine origin that caused a dozen infections in the United States in the 2nd half of last year [2011] appear to have pandemic potential. And the work, by scientists at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, seems to suggest that the fact the viruses haven't taken off in people may have more to do with human immunity than the viruses themselves. The findings are based on a transmission study in ferrets, work which is somewhat similar to the studies that sparked the ongoing controversy over lab-made H5N1 viruses. For several months now, Dutch and American researchers have been attempting to publish scientific papers showing how they developed H5N1 -- bird flu virus (avian A/H5N1 influenza virus) -- that transmitted easily among ferrets [considered the best animal for predicting how a flu virus might behave in people]. At a World Health Organization meeting last week, a group of experts -- many of whom were drawn from the world of influenza

research -- agreed that the studies should be published in full, despite a U.S. government request that key portions of data be kept out of the public domain. The new study, published Monday [20 Feb 2012] in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences [see citation and abstract below] involves work with an H3N2 swine virus -- now called an H3N2 variant [swine influenza A/H3N2v virus] -- that has caused sporadic human cases in the United States [and perhaps a case in Viet Nam, see part [2] below], including some limited person-to-person spread... [ProMED-mail](#)

Indonesia: Avian influenza situation, WHO update

21 February - The Ministry of Health of Indonesia has announced one new confirmed case of human infection with avian influenza A(H5N1) virus. The case is a 19 year-old female from Banten Province. She developed symptoms on 8 February 2012, was hospitalised on 12 February 2012 and died on 13 February 2012. Epidemiological investigation is ongoing by the Ministries of Health and Agriculture. Of the 185 cases confirmed to date in Indonesia, 153 have been fatal. [WHO](#)

[top of page...](#)

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

ECDC launches toolkit for foodborne, waterborne outbreaks

22 February - The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) yesterday launched a toolkit to help member states identify, investigate, and control food- and waterborne disease (FWD) outbreaks. The toolkit includes checklists, templates, guidelines, explanatory texts, and applications using EpiData, software developed for field epidemiologic investigations. On the toolkit home page, the ECDC says, "The primary purpose is to provide material that can be helpful when coordinating European FWD outbreak investigations." The home page says the toolkit could also be useful for investigating country-level outbreaks. The toolkit, produced by experts at Statens Serum Institut in Copenhagen and the Norwegian Institute of Public Health in Oslo, is meant to evolve as new features are added. The eight tools currently featured are: (1) when to consider an international investigation, (2) a checklist for teleconferences, (3) case definitions, (4) recommendations for finding cases, (5) questionnaire investigations using EpiData, (6) data analysis and analytical studies, (7) considerations for environmental and microbiological studies, and (8) alert systems. [CIDRAP News](#)

How using antibiotics in animal feed creates superbugs

21 February - Researchers have nailed down something scientists, government officials and agribusiness proponents have [argued about](#) for years: whether antibiotics in livestock feed give rise to antibiotic-resistant germs that can threaten humans. A [study](#) in the journal *mBio*, published by the American Society for Microbiology, shows how an antibiotic-susceptible staph germ passed from humans into pigs, where it became resistant to the antibiotics

tetracycline and methicillin. And then the antibiotic-resistant staph learned to jump back into humans. "It's like watching the birth of a superbug," says Lance Price of the Translational Genomics Research Institute, or TGen, in Flagstaff, Ariz. [NPR](#)

United gives break to pet owners on PCS moves

22 February - United Airlines is making an exception for military families who ship their pets on that airline when making permanent change-of-station moves, the company said Wednesday. "We evaluated our policies and developed a special process for military families traveling on permanent change-of-station orders only," said Mary Ryan, a spokeswoman for United Airlines. Under the policy, military travelers on PCS orders will be able to ship their pets under United's "PetSafe" program without having to pay an additional fee to a third-party freight forwarder, Ryan said. That fee would add \$1,500 to \$4,000 per pet to a traveler's costs, according to some estimates. United's pet-shipping costs without that fee generally run a few hundred dollars. From Japan to anywhere in the U.S., for example, the cost is \$309 for pets up to 50 pounds and \$359 for pets weighing 51 to 70 pounds. Military families should contact a United PetSafe desk for details on the special process, Ryan said.

[Army Times](#)

U.S.: Raw milk causes most illness from dairy products, CDC



21 February - Raw, or unpasteurized, milk causes 150 times more dairy product-related disease outbreaks than pasteurized milk. And states where the sale of raw milk is legal have twice as many outbreaks as states where it is illegal, according to a new U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study. "This study shows an association between state laws and the number of outbreaks and illnesses from raw milk products," Dr. Robert Tauxe, deputy director of CDC's division of foodborne, waterborne and environmental diseases, said in an agency news release. The 13-year review looked at more than 120 dairy product-related outbreaks that occurred in 30 states between 1993 and 2006. The outbreaks caused more than 4,400 illnesses, 239 hospitalizations and three deaths. Raw milk products -- including cheese and yogurt -- caused 73 of the outbreaks (60 percent) and most of the 239 hospitalizations. Some people mistakenly believe that raw milk is a healthier alternative to pasteurized milk, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Its website debunks the notion that raw milk is less likely than pasteurized milk to cause lactose intolerance, an inability to digest milk products. [Medline Plus](#)

[top of page...](#)

Daily diet soda may increase risk of heart attack, stroke: study

19 February - Diet soda may benefit the waistline, but people who drink it every day may have a heightened risk of heart attack and stroke, according to a new U.S. study. Although the researchers, whose work appeared in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, found that older adults who drank diet soda every day were 44 percent more likely to suffer a heart attack, their research did not prove that the sugar-free drinks alone were to blame. There may be other things about diet-soda lovers that explain the connection, said lead researcher Hannah Gardener, of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, and her team. "What we saw was an association. These people may tend to have more unhealthy habits," she said. She and her colleagues tried to account for that, noting that daily diet-soda drinkers did tend to be heavier and more often have heart risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes and unhealthy cholesterol levels. [Medline Plus](#)

Fewer melanoma deaths in counties with more dermatologists



20 February - Counties with more dermatologists have lower rates of deaths from melanoma, a new study finds. Researchers compared the number of dermatologists and melanoma deaths in 2,472 U.S. counties between January 2002 and December 2006. The analysis revealed that having 0.001 to one dermatologist per 100,000 people in a county was associated with a 35 percent lower rate of melanoma deaths. However, having a higher density of dermatologists was not associated with a further decrease in melanoma death rates. [Medline Plus](#)

Heart attack with no chest pain more likely in women

21 February - Women, especially younger women, are more likely than men to show up at the hospital with no chest pain or discomfort after having a heart attack, a new study suggests. Those symptoms, or lack of symptoms, can result in delayed medical care and differences in treatment that might in turn help explain why women in the study were also more likely to die of their heart attacks, according to researchers. "They might not even know they're having a heart attack," said Dr. John Canto, from the Watson Clinic in Lakeland, Florida, who worked on the report. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, close to 800,000 Americans have their first heart attack every year, and heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women. [Reuters](#)

Migraines may raise the risk of depression in women



23 February - As if having migraine headaches weren't enough of a burden, a new study finds that women with migraines are also more likely to develop depression — about 40% more likely than women who have no history of the headaches. The study found that even women whose migraines had ceased in the previous year had a higher risk of becoming depressed than migraine-free women. For the study, researchers led by Dr. Tobias Kurth, an epidemiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, analyzed data on 36,154 women involved in the ongoing Women's Health Study. None of the participants had depression at the start of the study, and 6,456 were currently experiencing migraines or had in the past. [TIME](#)

Monitoring your health with mobile devices

22 February - Dr. Eric Topol is only half joking when he says the smartphone is the future of medicine — because most of his patients already seem “surgically connected” to one. But he says in all seriousness that the smartphone will be a sensor that will help people take better control of their health by tracking it with increasing precision. His book, “The Creative Destruction of Medicine,” lays out his vision for how people will start running common medical tests, skipping office visits and sharing their data with people other than their physicians. Dr. Topol, a cardiologist at the Scripps Medical Institute in La Jolla, Calif., is already seeing signs of this as companies find ways to hook medical devices to the computing power of smartphones. Devices to measure [blood pressure](#), monitor blood sugar, hear heartbeats and chart heart activity are already in the hands of patients. More are coming. [New York Times](#)

[top of page...](#)

USAFRICOM

Burundi: Rain-displaced need urgent aid

22 February - At least 2,000 people displaced by recent torrential rains in the area of Gatumba, on the outskirts of Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, need food and shelter, say officials. The rains destroyed at least 400 houses and there are fears of further damage in the worst-affected Kinyinya, Mushasha and Muyange areas amid ongoing rains. “They [the houses] are surrounded by water and some continue to [collapse],” Emmanuel Masumbuko, head of the Gatumba Zone, told IRIN. A majority of the affected families are seeking refuge with neighbours whose houses were not destroyed; some 32 other families as of 21 February were sheltered at a local Anglican church. [IRIN](#)

Congo: Cholera "continues spreading"



21 February - Health authorities in the Republic of Congo have recorded 340 cases of cholera, nine of them fatal, since June 2011, in the northern district of Likouala, and have warned that the disease continues to spread and that some health centres lack sufficient treatment. "Some deaths have not been taken into account because the [deceased's] families have not reported them," said Jean Martin Mabiala, the doctor in charge of health services in the district, adding that there were other suspected cases that had not been confirmed because of the remoteness of their locations. He said the crew of a river boat from the Central African Republic had buried two people suspected to have died of cholera in early February. The epidemic has struck a 500km-radius area stretching from Betou to Liranga, which includes the department's main town, Impofondo. [IRIN](#)

Nigeria: Lassa fever kills 40

22 February - An outbreak of Lassa fever has killed 40 people and infected dozens of others in a third of Nigeria's 36 states over the past six weeks, a senior health official said Wednesday. "We have 40 deaths, including two doctors and six nurses, from lassa fever which broke out in 12 states in the past six weeks," health ministry's chief epidemiologist Henry Akpan told AFP. A total of 397 cases were reported, out of which 87 have been confirmed. [AFP](#)

South Sudan: High hopes for defeating "neglected" diseases



23 February - Health workers in the world's newest country are hoping that the [pledge by pharmaceutical companies and world leaders](#) to combat "neglected" tropical diseases will finally help to have an impact on South Sudan's appalling health indicators. The London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases in January pledged to ensure the supply of drugs and other interventions to eradicate dracunculiasis (Guinea worm) by 2015 and eliminate [lymphatic Filariasis](#) (elephantiasis), [leprosy](#), human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), and [blinding trachoma](#) by 2020. It also pledged to control Schistosomiasis (bilharzia), soil transmitted helminthes, Chagas disease, visceral leishmaniasis ([kala-azar](#)), and Onchocerciasis (river blindness) by 2020. The UK Minister for International Development, Stephen O'Brien, said the initiative would "help make guinea worm the second human disease ever to be eradicated in history by 2015, help secure the elimination of elephantiasis and river blindness, and protect millions more from bilharzia". Decades of war, neglect, and lack of development have left South Sudan with nine out of 10 of these key neglected tropical diseases – all but Chagas disease, which is endemic to South America. [IRIN](#)

[top of page...](#)

Iraq: Call to adopt modern irrigation techniques

22 February - Fluctuating water levels in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Iraq's primary sources of surface water, will continue to mar agricultural development unless more equitable water access rights are agreed with neighbouring countries and modern irrigation techniques are more widely adopted to reduce wastage, says a government official. "Iraq must take a legal step with the [help of the] UN and international organizations and community to determine its water rights with these countries... We must start using modern irrigation technology as we are still using the old, traditional ways which waste huge amounts of water," said Abdul-Razzaq Jassim Hassoun, head of the Planning Ministry's Agricultural Statistics Department. The Ministry of Agriculture was promoting modern irrigation systems, particularly drip and sprinkle irrigation systems. Sprinkler irrigation would need 4-6 years to complete, but could save 3.6 billion cubic metres of water a year, said Deputy Agriculture Minister Riadh Al-Qaisi. [IRIN](#)

Syria: Worrying signs for food security



21 February – Experts worry that Syrians will have increasing problems accessing food in the coming months, as prices rise, conflict disrupts supply lines, dwindling finances strain subsidies and imports face challenges. Nearly one year of unrest in Syria has made it difficult for aid workers to assess the exact food needs in the country, but the little information that does exist suggests that the accessibility and affordability of food are already shrinking, while the availability of food could also become a problem later this year. "Life in Syria has become harsh," an inhabitant of Sanhaya, a Damascus suburb, told [IRIN](#). "Electricity is cut off up to six hours a day, sometimes more. Heating oil and fuel are very difficult to find," he added. [IRIN](#)

[top of page...](#)

Balkans lurch from killer blizzards to icy floods

22 February - The Arctic cold is over for now, but that does not mean the Balkan weather problems are over. In fact, if the weather gets too warm too fast, the troubles may only be beginning. Already hundreds of boats and barges have been crushed by cascading ice on the Danube and fears are growing that a thaw accompanied by spring rains will cause massive flooding and even landslides. The snow through much of the region is still five times its normal depth... In neighboring Bosnia, emergency crews are preparing for a fresh battle with winter when rivers overflow with snowmelt... Bosnians are also being warned of

the danger of possible landslides and citizens are asked to contribute to the country's recovery by removing snow around their homes and taking control of melting water. [ABC News](#)

Measles cases in Europe topped 30,000 again in 2011

22 February - Measles cases in 29 European countries totaled 30,567 in 2011, up slightly from the 30,264 in 2010 and four times more than the 7,175 cases in 2009, the ECDC reported yesterday. France accounted for about half of the cases (15,206) and had the highest rate per 100,000 population at 23.4. More than 90% of the cases occurred in five countries: France, Italy, Romania, Spain, and Germany. Twenty-four of the 29 reporting countries had more cases in 2011 than the year before, and the only measles-free countries were Iceland and Cyprus. On the positive side, Bulgaria had only 157 cases last year, after battling an epidemic of 22,000 cases in 2010, the report said. It also noted that Ukraine is fighting an ongoing measles outbreak, with more than 3,000 cases so far this year. The country will host the 2012 European Football Championship in June, and unvaccinated visitors will run a risk of infection, the ECDC said. [CIDRAP News](#)

Scotland: Mumps

20 February - A health warning has been reissued to students after 15 more cases of mumps were reported at Glasgow University. It brings the total number of students infected since the start of the month [February 2012] to 30 although university officials had claimed the outbreak was leveling off. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's Public Health Protection Unit is liaising closely with the university and health officials said none of the students were giving cause for concern. [ProMED-mail](#)

United Kingdom: 210,000 people face alcohol death risk, warn doctors



19 February - Failure to reform alcohol laws could lead to 210,000 preventable deaths in England and Wales in the next 20 years, doctors have warned. They are putting pressure on the government ahead of its "alcohol strategy" for both countries, expected in the coming months. [Writing in The Lancet](#), doctors said the UK was at a "potential tipping point". Prime Minister David Cameron has already vowed to tackle the "scandal" of drunkenness and alcohol abuse. The projected mortality figures come from Prof Ian Gilmore, a former president of the Royal College of Physicians, Dr Nick Sheron, from the National Institute for Health Research and members of the British Society of Gastroenterology. Their figure of 210,000 is a reduction from their [previous estimate of 250,000](#) and represents their "worst-case scenario" of no change to alcohol policy. [BBC News](#)

[top of page...](#)

All U.S. adults should get whooping cough shot

22 February - U.S. health experts recommended Wednesday that all adults get vaccinated against whooping cough (pertussis), an infectious bacterial disease that triggers uncontrollable coughing and is especially dangerous to infants. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices voted to expand the vaccination recommendation to include all adults, including those aged 65 and older. Specifically, the panel recommended that adults aged 19 and older who have not been vaccinated with the Tdap vaccine should do so. Tdap protects against whooping cough (pertussis) in older children and adults. It also protects against diphtheria and tetanus. All three illnesses are caused by bacteria, and are potentially deadly diseases. [Medline Plus](#)

U.S.: EPA dioxin assessment raises red flag for some

22 February - Nearly three decades in the making, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently announced its landmark [dioxin assessment](#) with the conclusion: "Generally, over a person's lifetime, current exposure to dioxins does not pose a significant health risk." But [Dr. Arnold J. Schecter](#), a University of Texas professor of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, says dioxins pose a risk for fetuses, newborns and people with immune deficiencies such as AIDS patients. "Some people are going to be more susceptible because they receive a higher dose or they're more sensitive," says Dr. Schecter, who served on an EPA advisory panel on dioxins. [Dioxins](#) are a class of highly toxic chemicals released into the environment by industrial production, waste incineration and forest fires. The chemicals get into the food chain and accumulate in animal fat. Air emissions of dioxins in the United States have decreased 90% since 1987, thanks to the EPA, state and industry efforts, [the agency said Friday](#). Even so, some dioxins are now present in every man, woman and child on the planet. The EPA characterizes dioxins as "likely" carcinogens. They are also linked to developmental and reproductive problems, damage to the immune system, hormone disruption, skin rashes and discoloration, and mild liver damage. [CNN](#)

U.S.: FDA continues to fight drug shortages



21 February - In response to President Obama's executive order to help prevent future drug shortages, the Food and Drug Administration Tuesday announced a series of steps to increase the supply of two critically needed cancer drugs: Methotrexate, a drug used to treat children with

leukemia and some adult cancers, and Doxil, used to treat numerous forms of cancer from lung to ovarian. Doxil is also used in AIDS-related Kaposi's sarcoma and multiple myeloma. "Through the collaborative work of FDA, industry, and other stakeholders, patients and families waiting for these products or anxious about their availability should now be able to get the medication they need," said FDA Commissioner, Dr. Margaret A. Hamburg. Because there were critically short supplies of both drugs the FDA is taking steps to increase available supplies for U.S. patients. [CNN](#)

U.S.: Hepatitis C linked to more deaths than HIV

21 February - Hepatitis C viral infection (HCV) has surpassed HIV as a cause of mortality in the United States, according to a new study from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [published](#) in the February 21 issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Termed the "silent epidemic," HCV is the most common blood-borne chronic viral infection. It affects about 3.2 million Americans and represents a leading cause of liver disease, cirrhosis, and death. [Medscape Today](#)

[top of page...](#)

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Burma: Clinics turn away HIV, TB patients

22 February - The French medical aid group Doctors Without Borders says cuts in international aid for treating HIV and tuberculosis are putting tens of thousands of lives at risk in Burma. Doctors Without Borders says two thirds of HIV patients in Burma in need of antiretroviral therapy cannot get it. That leaves 85,000 people susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis, responsible for a quarter of all AIDS-related deaths. The group, known by its French abbreviation MSF, says every year there are an estimated 9,300 new cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis, but to date only 300 are treated. To help close the gap, MSF expected to receive financial support under a new round of aid from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. But, in November, it was abruptly cancelled because of a shortage of cash from donor nations. [VOA News](#)

Radiation detected 400 miles off Japan coast

21 February - Radioactive contamination from the Fukushima power plant disaster has been detected as far as almost 400 miles off Japan in the Pacific Ocean, with water showing readings of up to 1,000 times more than prior levels, scientists reported Tuesday. But those results for the substance cesium-137 are far below the levels that are generally considered harmful, either to marine animals or people who eat seafood, said Ken Buesseler of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts. He spoke Tuesday in Salt Lake City at the annual Ocean Sciences Meeting, attended by more than 4,000 researchers this week. The results are for water samples taken in June, about three months after the power plant disaster, Buesseler said. In addition to thousands of water samples, researchers also sampled fish and plankton and found cesium-137 levels well below the legal health limit. [TIME](#)

Vietnam: Hand-foot-mouth disease outbreaks

23 February - The disease has been spreading in Quang Ngai, Quang Nam and Da Nang in central Vietnam after several months of calm. In Quang Ngai province, the number of children who contracted hand-foot-mouth disease has soared. Doctor Nguyen Tan Phu,

head of the Quang Ngai Province Hospital's Pediatrics Ward, said that in the past seven days, 63 children were hospitalized, raising the total number of child patients to 116 so far this year. Previously, this disease used to outbreak from April to June; but this year, the disease has broken out since early February, doctor Phu said. Since mid-2011, Quang Ngai has had more than 7,100 patients, five of them have died. [VietNamNet Bridge](#)

[top of page...](#)

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Brazil: Gram negative bacilli, MDR

20 February - On 15 Dec 2011, a KPC [*Klebsiella pneumoniae*_ carbapenemase-producing] microorganism was detected for the 1st time at the Hospital Celso Ramos, in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina state, in a patient with a urinary tract infection who had been [transferred] from another hospital in the region. As of 15 Feb 2012, 6 additional patients have been identified [with infections due to KPC-producing organisms]: 2 patients with bloodstream, 1 with surgical wound, 1 with respiratory, and 2 with urinary infections. Another 6 patients had colonization detected in fecal samples. Of the 13 patients, 5 died, 2 were discharged, and 6 remain hospitalized. The isolates were susceptible to polymyxin and amikacin and showed intermediate susceptibility to tigecycline. [ProMED-mail](#)

[top of page...](#)

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