

30 March 2012

Army Public Health Weekly Update

The Army Public Health Update is a collection of articles taken verbatim from public sources to offer awareness of current health issues and the media coverage given to them. The articles do not necessarily represent US Army Medical Department opinions, views, policy, or guidance, and should not be construed or interpreted as being endorsed by the US Army Medical Department.

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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Public Health Week 2-8 April 2012

This year's National Public Health Week theme, "A Healthier America Begins Today," encourages Americans and their communities to take preventive measures to help improve their lives. Little steps can lead to big changes.

Join USAPHC in supporting Public Health Week.



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U.S. MILITARY

Initial assessment of impact of adenovirus type 4 and type 7 vaccine on FRI and virus transmission in military basic trainees, March 2012

March 2012 - After a 12-year hiatus, military recruit training centers resumed administration of adenovirus type 4 and type 7 vaccine, live, oral (adenovirus vaccine) to trainees beginning in October of 2011. Subsequently, rates of febrile respiratory illnesses (FRI) and adenovirus isolations markedly declined. These findings are consistent with those of a placebo-controlled efficacy trial conducted prior to the vaccine's licensure by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Continued surveillance will clarify the longer term impact of vaccine use.

[Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Many think Bales case reflects a military pushed to the limit

29 March - American soldiers in Afghanistan aren't supposed to drink booze. They're not supposed to stray "outside the wire" of their fortifications on their own. And they aren't supposed to train their rifles on innocents. Yet that's just what Army Staff Sgt. Robert Bales is accused of: drinking and then slipping out of his Kandahar province outpost on March 11 and shooting to death 17 civilians — nine of them children — in their sleep. A country numb to the tragic frequency of suicide among combat veterans and climbing divorce rates among military families now must take notice of atrocity. "One country can't keep an occupying force in another country for 10 years and not expect for things now and again to go wrong," said Cindy Williams, a defense analyst and personnel specialist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Run enough troops through enough bloody combat tours, said Williams, and "you can't expect otherwise. That's the problem." [Star and Stripes](#)

Post-traumatic stress's surprisingly positive flip side

22 March - ...The Army's resilience training program was shepherded by Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum... Cornum wanted to develop a psychological training program for the Army... Cornum met with Martin Seligman, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, a giant in the field of positive psychology, who developed a program to help adolescents perform better in school. Cornum worked with him to set up a series of meetings with experts in resilience, positive psychology and growth. Then, largely under Seligman's guidance, the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program came into shape. In less than two years — without a single pilot or study — the program has been rolled out to the Army's one million soldiers. Every soldier takes the General Assessment Tool, a 105-question survey, which asks soldiers to respond to statements like, "In uncertain times I usually expect the best" (Cornum would score high on this), or "If something can go wrong for me, it usually will." Depending on how soldiers score, they are prompted to complete online training in any of the program's five key areas: physical, emotional, social, family and spiritual (which could mean either religious faith or personal reflection). [New York Times](#)

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Pertussis Fact Sheet

A new fact sheet on **pertussis** (whooping cough) that discusses the symptoms, prevention and treatment of pertussis is now available in the [USAPHC Library](#).

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.

GLOBAL

20 million-plus individuals infected with hepatitis E in Asia and Africa

27 March - New research funded by the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 20.1 million individuals were infected with hepatitis E virus (HEV) genotypes 1 and 2 across nine world regions in 2005. According to findings available in the April issue of *Hepatology*, there were 3.4 million symptomatic cases, 70,000 deaths, and 3,000 stillbirths from HEV that year in countries throughout Asia and Africa. Unlike hepatitis virus B and C strains that lead to chronic disease states, HEV causes acute illness. Previous studies show HEV genotypes 1 and 2 specifically infect humans, and are associated with large outbreaks in developing countries where sanitation conditions are poor. There is evidence that HEV increases mortality risk among pregnant women. While a safe and effective HEV vaccine has been developed, it has not been widely implemented. "Our study represents the first attempt to estimate the annual global impact of hepatitis E," says lead author Dr. David Rein of the social science research organization NORC at the University of Chicago. Estimates were created by modeling the disease burden of HEV genotypes 1 and 2 in the 9 regions, representing 71 percent of the world's population. Based on published evidence the team—a collaboration between researchers from NORC, WHO and RTI International—also estimated annual incidence of infection to determine symptomatic, asymptomatic, and mortality cases. [Infection Control Today](#)

A three-degree warmer world by 2050?



27 March - The apocalyptic vision presented on cinema screens of a world devoid of food (*Hunger Games*) or with too much water (*Waterworld*) as a result of climate change, is not as far-fetched as some may think. The results of a new study by the world's biggest climate modelling system show that not only could global temperatures cross the [two degrees Celsius barrier](#), but may warm by three degrees Celsius by 2050 if we emit atmosphere-warming gases at the current rate. The study, led by Oxford University's Dan Rowlands posits a substantial increase in global temperatures within little more than a generation. Most recent warnings, including those by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), are more ambiguous, saying a two-degree hike is almost certain "by the turn of the century". [IRIN](#)

WaterAid celebrates World Water Day 2012

22 March - World Water Day, Thursday 22 March 2012, draws attention to something most of us take for granted despite its importance -- safe water. There are still 783 million people worldwide without access to clean drinking water. This year, World Water Day takes place one month before the 'Sanitation and Water for All' High Level Meeting in Washington DC, where world leaders will discuss what they're going to do to tackle the water and sanitation

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crisis. We can put pressure on these leaders to make real commitments to ensure the remaining 783 million people without safe drinking water get it - within our lifetime. [All Africa](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

29 March 2012:

- Influenza cases decreased slightly within the MHS compared to previous weeks; influenza activity remains low to moderate in overseas DoD laboratory surveillance networks.
- Influenza-like illness (ILI) incidence rates decreased from last week within the MHS for most of the regions.
- The influenza vaccination rate for the DoD (Active Duty component only) is 97%; this is the final update on vaccine coverage for this influenza season. [AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 11 (11-17 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 11 (12-18 March 2012), medium or low intensity was reported by 25 countries and decreasing trends were reported by 15 countries. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

IFITM3 variant linked with worse flu symptoms, need for hospitalization

26 March - People who carry a particular variant of the interferon-inducible transmembrane 3 (IFITM3) gene are more likely to develop serious symptoms as a result of a flu virus infection than people who carry other variants of the gene, scientists report. An international team led by researchers at the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and Ragon Institute of Massachusetts General Hospital first demonstrated that mice lacking the Ifitm3 gene developed fulminant viral pneumonia when challenged with a normally mildly pathogenic influenza virus. When the researchers then analyzed the IFITM3 alleles of

patients who were hospitalized with seasonal or pandemic H1N1/09 virus, they found an increased frequency of a minor IFITM3 allele, SNP rs23352-C. Subsequent functional assays showed that the protein encoded by this IFITM3 gene variant was less capable of restricting influenza virus replication in vitro. The Sanger Institute's Paul Kellam, Ph.D., and colleagues report their studies in *Nature* in a paper titled "IFITM3 restricts the morbidity and mortality associated with influenza." [GenEng News](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

24 March – Influenza activity appears to be decreasing and overall activity remains lower than last year. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Indonesia: Avian influenza situation, WHO update

26 March - The Ministry of Health of Indonesia has notified WHO of a new case of human infection with avian influenza A(H5N1) virus. The case is a 17 year-old male from Nusa Tenggara Barat Province. He developed fever on 28 February 2012 and sought treatment on 1 March 2012. His condition deteriorated and he was admitted to a referral hospital but he died on 9 March 2012. Epidemiological investigation conducted by a team from the health office indicated that there were sudden poultry die-offs in his neighbourhood. To date, of the 188 cases reported in Indonesia since 2005, 156 have been fatal. [WHO](#)

La Niña could set the stage for flu pandemics



26 March - In 1918, the Spanish flu spread around the world, claiming between 50 million and 100 million lives — more than 3 percent of the world's population. The previous fall and winter, La Niña had brought cooler-than-normal sea-surface temperatures to the central and eastern equatorial Pacific. More recently in 2009, swine flu swept across the planet. Again, the widespread outbreak was preceded by La Niña conditions. This link might be more than coincidental, according to new research, and could lead to improved predictions of future pandemics. In a new study in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Jeffrey Shaman of Columbia University and Marc Lipsitch of Harvard University note that La Niña can alter weather patterns and shift the migration patterns of birds. Such a rerouting of avian flu carriers could set the stage for the rise of novel — and deadly — strains of the virus, they say. To examine the connection between La Niña and flu pandemics, Shaman and Lipsitch looked at the four most recent, well-dated human influenza pandemics — 1918, 1957, 1968 and 2009 — and then looked at El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions during the fall and winter immediately preceding the emergence of the outbreaks. The researchers found that, indeed, all four pandemics were preceded by La Niña. [Earth Magazine](#)

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Abu Dhabi: Drinking water withdrawn from markets for non-compliance with safety rules

27 March - As per instructions from the Ministry of Environment and Water, Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority has taken steps to withdraw containers of Masafi water which were not compliant with the specifications. The containers withdrawn were 500 ml bottles with a manufacturing date and expiry date of 17.2.2012 and 16.2.2013 respectively. The action on the water was due to its containing bromide beyond the permitted levels. [Zawya](#)

E. coli prompts recall of 16,800 pounds of ground beef

26 March - Sysco Seattle, Inc., is recalling approximately 16,800 pounds of ground beef patties imported from Canada because they may be contaminated with E. coli O157:H7, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced March 24. The recall involves 10-pound boxes of PRIME RIB BEEF PATTIES 8-ounce, with product code 55317, and production code 11 NO 22; and 10-pound boxes of PRIME RIB BEEF PATTIES 71 grams, with product code 55391 and bearing a production code of 11 SE 01 or 12 JA 04. The recalled products were produced by New Food Classics of Burlington, Ontario, and imported by Sysco Seattle for distribution to restaurants in Arizona, Colorado, Texas and Washington. On March 21, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced a recall of 135 different beef products produced by New Food Classics and distributed under various brand names, including Best Value, Irresistibles, Keg, Maple Lodge Farms, PC and PC Blue Menu, Calgary Stampede, Country Morning Gold, Western Family, and Grillhouse. [Food Product Design](#)

Egypt: Livestock disease puts livelihoods, food security at risk



27 March - A new strain of foot-and-mouth disease in Egypt has killed several thousand livestock, put farmers' livelihoods at risk and could threaten regional food security, say local and international experts. "Urgent action is required to control a major outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and prevent its spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East, which could have serious implications for food security in the region," the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [warned](#) on 22 March. "If the virus kills more cattle, there will be more economic suffering for a large number of people," said Mohamed Al Falw, a veterinary officer in Sawaris village, in the Greater Cairo governorate of Qallubia. "The government cannot just keep talking and leave these farmers to face this tragedy on their own." [IRIN](#)

U.S.: FDA action ordered on farm's antibiotic use

23 March - A federal court judge has ordered the Food and Drug Administration to take action on its own 35-year-old rule that would stop farmers from mixing popular antibiotics

into animal feed, a practice which is widely believed to have led to a surge in dangerous, drug-resistant bacteria. In 1977, the FDA concluded that the overuse of antibiotics in livestock, poultry and other animals weakened the treatment's effectiveness in humans. The agency issued an order that would have banned non-medical use of penicillin and tetracycline in farm animals, unless drugmakers could show the drugs were safe. But the rule was never enforced, following vigorous pushback from members of Congress and lobbyists for farmers and drugmakers. Farming groups have long argued the drugs are needed to keep animals healthy, though many natural food producers dispute such claims. In a ruling handed down Thursday, Judge Theodore Katz said the FDA must begin steps to withdraw approval of the two antibiotics for routine use in animals, siding with four consumer safety groups that brought a lawsuit against the agency. "Today we take a long overdue step toward ensuring that we preserve these lifesaving medicines for those who need them most — people," said Avinash Kar, attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council. [TIME](#)

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WELLNESS

Childhood exposure to germs can bolster immune system

27 March - A new study suggests that getting a little dirty might be good for your health. The research found that adult mice raised in a germ-free lab environment were more likely than normal lab mice to develop allergies, asthma and other serious autoimmune disorders, in which normally defensive immune system cells turn against the body's tissues and organs. There are more than 80 autoimmune disorders, including common allergies such as hay fever; rheumatoid arthritis, which attacks the joints; Crohn's disease, an inflammatory bowel condition; and juvenile diabetes. [VOA News](#)

Chocolate consumption tied to lower BMI

28 March - Eating chocolate every few days may help keep weight off, study findings suggest. In a cross-sectional analysis of nearly 1,000 participants in a clinical study, more frequent chocolate consumption was associated with lower BMI, Beatrice Golomb, MD, PhD, and colleagues at the University of California San Diego in La Jolla, Calif., reported in Archives of Internal Medicine. "The connection of higher chocolate consumption frequency to lower BMI is opposite to associations presumed based on calories alone, but concordant with a growing body of literature suggesting that the character — as well as the quantity — of calories has an impact on [metabolic syndrome] factors," the researchers wrote. Results from previous studies have shown favorable metabolic associations between chocolate consumption and BP, insulin and cholesterol levels, which many think may be due to antioxidant phytonutrients found in chocolate. But concerns persist because chocolate is often consumed as a sweet and is high in calories. To get a better understanding of the risk-benefit profile of chocolate consumption, the researchers studied data from 972 men and

women who did not have known cardiovascular disease, diabetes or extremes of LDL cholesterol levels (inclusive LDL was 115 to 190 mg/dL). [The Clinical Advisor](#)

Gynecologists urged to screen for heart disease

28 March - Screening women for heart disease at obstetrics and gynecology clinics may detect cardiovascular risk and head off heart problems for women who do not see a primary care physician, researchers said. Many women do not have a primary care physician but seek out basic OB/GYN services, the researchers said. Women often are undertreated or unaware of risk factors for heart disease, yet it is the leading cause of death among women in the United States. And the rate of heart-related death in women between the ages of 35 and 44 continues to increase 1 percent per year, the researchers said. [Reuters](#)

HPV vaccine may help women with cervical conditions



28 March - A new study finds that women diagnosed with pre-cancerous cervical conditions after they get the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine can still benefit from the shot because it cuts their risk of future HPV-related cervical disease. "This study helps to clarify the effects of the HPV vaccine and further define its use," noted one expert, Dr. Elizabeth Poynor, a gynecologic oncologist and pelvic surgeon at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Poynor, who was not involved in the new research, said it "is the first to address the effect of the HPV vaccine in women who have undergone treatment for HPV-related disease." The study was published online March 27 in the *BMJ*. [Medline Plus](#)

Some doctors still mistaken on IUD safety

27 March - Many U.S. doctors and other health providers may have mistaken beliefs about the safety of IUD contraceptives, a new government study suggests. "IUDs are safe for nulliparous women," said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Crystal P. Tyler, who led the study, referring to women who've never given birth. "And IUDs are as effective as sterilization, but they're a reversible form of contraception." IUDs, or intrauterine devices, are implanted in the uterus, where they release small amounts of either copper or the hormone progestin to prevent pregnancy. In the U.S., IUDs are much less popular than birth control pills and condoms for contraception. But groups like the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) say IUDs are highly effective, and more women should be aware of that. One of the issues may be doctors' beliefs about IUD safety. In the new study, researchers at the CDC found that 30 percent of health providers they surveyed doubted the safety of IUDs for women who'd never given birth. When IUDs first came out, there were concerns that they might raise the risk of pelvic infection and jeopardize women's future fertility. So the original IUD labeling said the devices were contraindicated for women who'd never had children. But it's now known that IUDs do not carry those risks, said Tyler. And unlike birth control pills and condoms -- which require "perfect" use -- IUDs are put in place, then can be "forgotten," Tyler told Reuters Health. [Medline Plus](#)

African Meningitis Belt: Meningococcal disease situation, WHO

23 March - From 1 January to 11 March (epidemiologic week 10), outbreaks of meningococcal disease has been reported in 15 districts in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (see table below¹). These outbreaks have been detected as part of the enhanced surveillance in the African Meningitis Belt conducted in 14 countries² where a total of 6 685 suspected meningitis cases including 639 deaths have been reported. The outbreaks are mainly caused by the W135 serogroup of *Neisseria meningitidis* (Nm) bacteria. In Chad, the predominant pathogen is Nm A, although NmW135 contributed to an outbreak in one district. Whereas NmA has always been the leading cause of epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa, outbreaks of NmW135 have already occurred in the region, since 2002. The countries are responding to these outbreaks by enhancing surveillance, reinforcing treatment of patients and implementing mass vaccination campaigns... [WHO](#)

Nigeria: 70 million Nigerians need treatment against elephantiasis

27 March - At least 70 million Nigerians need medication to prevent elephantiasis, but health experts have warned that efforts to integrate the control of malaria and eradication of lymphatic filariasis--two diseases transmitted by mosquito--is low in Nigeria. At a national conference organised by the federal ministry of health and the Carter Centre, they called for interventions that will involve wider distribution and use of treated mosquito nets and mass drug administration, using de-wormers Ivermectin and Albendazole. Some 10 million people have already been treated in 101 council areas by the federal health ministry and the Carter Centre, which became involved in elephantiasis assistance in 1999, but those treated were less than 20% of the population in each location. Former head of state Yakubu Gowon said the country needed "a rapid scale-up of interventions targeting the two diseases," adding that health workers owed Nigerians a duty to end the transmission by 2020. [All Africa](#)

Nigeria: 90 percent of women are not using contraception

28 March - Nine out of 10 Nigerian women of childbearing age are not using modern contraceptive methods. This is one of the startling revelations at a stakeholders' dissemination on the Universal Access to female Condom programme aimed at increasing demand and access to female condoms in Nigeria. Studies have shown that the country has a low contraceptive prevalence rate of 10 per cent as regards modern family method which has resulted to unplanned pregnancy and increased maternal mortality rates. Indeed, reports have shown that the incidence of HIV in Nigeria is also relatively high among West African countries, especially among women and girls who disproportionately bear the HIV and AIDS burden in the country, both in risk and in care for those who are infected and affected by HIV. To address the situation, stakeholders last week converged on Lagos to

examine the challenges posed by Sexually Transmitted Diseases STDs, and unwanted pregnancies as well as proffer solutions. [All Africa](#)

West Africa: Giant anti-polio drive threatened by insecurity

23 March - Health volunteers, aid agency and health authority staff are trying to immunize 111.1 million children under five across 20 countries in West and Central Africa against polio. The four-day campaign started today, but instability in some of the target countries could hamper the effort. Parts of Nigeria are highly unstable due to ongoing attacks by Boko Haram; a rebellion is currently under way in northern Mali, while security in the capital Bamako is also precarious with a military junta having ousted the president. Over half of the children targeted - some 57.7 million, are in Nigeria, which is West Africa's only polio-endemic country. Meanwhile parts of Niger (for instance Tillabéri in the northwest) are difficult to access, as are parts of eastern Chad, with some aid agencies working only with armed escorts. "Access to children [in some of these places] can be a serious problem," said UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) regional health specialist Halima Dao. "Vaccinators' safety can be compromised, or insecurity means the whole population of a village may flee at a moment's notice, or there may be far more people than we expected in an area, due to displacement," she told IRIN. [All Africa](#)

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USCENTCOM

Pakistan: Anti-polio drive moves to tribal agencies



29 March - Pakistan, which has reported 14 cases of polio this year, is focusing its anti-polio drive on tribal agencies along the Afghanistan border where militant violence has affected eradication efforts, say officials. Last year, 198 cases were confirmed - the highest for any country in the world, despite the government's launch of a [National Emergency Plan against polio](#) in 2011 and the setting up of a task force to combat the disease. "Frankly speaking, this is very embarrassing for us as a nation. India's success is pointed out at every meeting," a health department official in Islamabad, who asked not to be named, told IRIN. India has remained free of new cases for a year, and been [removed](#) from the list of polio endemic countries by the World Health Organization (WHO). Pakistan remains on the list alongside Nigeria and Afghanistan. One area where attention is being focused is Bara `tehsil' (administrative unit) in the troubled Khyber Agency, one of seven tribal agencies along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Here, [militant violence](#) has consistently impeded vaccination drives. [IRIN](#)

Pakistan: Use of contraceptives can further improve

30 March - If contraceptive prevalence can rise by 9% in districts such as Rajanpur, Charsadda, Sanghar and Mardan, the uptake of family planning use can also happen throughout the country. This was stated by Dr. Ali Mir, Chief of Party Falah, a project of the Population Council, in a seminar titled 'Family Planning Revitalised: The Falah Experience' organised on Thursday. The seminar was attended by representatives from the federal and provincial governments, USAID, donor organisations, academics, NGOs, and civil society. The Falah was implemented by a consortium led by the Population Council and supported by USAID. It was aimed at improving maternal and child health by introducing the innovative concept healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies or "Birth Spacing" and to remove barriers to family planning by educating families on methods of family planning that are widely endorsed by religious community. [The News International](#)

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USEUCOM

England: Drought conditions spread

28 March - Drought has spread in England, with parts of East and South Yorkshire now officially affected. The Environment Agency said public water supplies should not be affected, but lower river and groundwater levels meant businesses and farmers taking water from rivers should use it wisely. The agency has already declared drought in areas of the South East and East Anglia. Seven water companies in those areas are to impose hosepipe bans on 5 April. Yorkshire Water said it did not anticipate any restrictions such as hosepipe bans for the time being. In a statement, the company said it would constantly review the situation "as the dry weather continues". "Our regional water supply system gives us flexibility, what it doesn't give us is an unlimited supply of water, so we would always encourage our customers to only use what they need, when they need it." As the warm spell across the UK continued on Tuesday, firefighters were involved in tackling blazes in North Yorkshire, south Wales, Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders. The grassland fires in Scotland, which had broken out on Monday afternoon, took until Tuesday evening to extinguish. [BBC News](#)

European Union/European Economic Area: Epidemiology of TB in 2010

22 March - The 2012 combined tuberculosis (TB) surveillance and monitoring report for the European Union and European Economic Area identifies a mean annual decline in TB notification rate by 4.4% from 2006 to 2010. Culture confirmation for new pulmonary cases and drug susceptibility testing have increased to 65.6% and 70.8%, but remain under their targets of 80% and 100%, respectively. Reporting of treatment outcome and co-infection with human immunodeficiency virus also remain suboptimal. Strengthened control practices are needed to allow progress towards TB elimination. [Eurosurveillance](#)

Europeans are world's heaviest drinkers, WHO report



27 March - People in Europe drink more alcohol than in any other part of the world, downing the equivalent of 12.5 litres of pure alcohol a year or almost three glasses of wine a day, according to report by the World Health Organisation and the European Commission. But while the title of world's heaviest drinkers goes to the European Union as whole, where consumption is almost double the world average, there are also wide variations in drinking levels between sub-regions, as well as big differences in how frequently, where and when people drink. [Reuters](#)

Spain: Leishmaniasis, human, canine

28 March - The Ministry of Health is investigating the largest outbreak of leishmaniasis in humans, which is centred in Fuenlabrada, Madrid. The illness is usually restricted to dogs but can be transmitted to humans, and the number of human cases has increased from 15 in 2009 to 118 last year [2011]. At the end of February [2012], the number of cases reached 228. Since 2010, residents and users of the parks at Polvoranca and Bosqu Sur have complained of increasing cases. It causes skin ulcers and, in severe cases, inflammation of the liver and spleen. According to the Madrid Vets College, Colvelma, there were 101 cases in humans in 2003 in all of Spain, of which 24 were in the Madrid region. Now they say between 7-8 percent of the dogs in the region are infected, a condition which will almost certainly lead to them being sacrificed. [ProMED-mail](#)

Total sends fire-fighting ships near North Sea gas leak

29 March - France's Total sent fire-fighting ships close to the scene of a gas leak from its North Sea Elgin platform on Thursday as a large gas cloud led to fears of an explosion. The company said the gas originated thousands of metres below the seabed, which engineers said might mean that a relief well - one possible option to stop the leak - could take months to drill. Total has not yet found a way to stop the gas leak... The leak, one of the biggest in the North Sea for decades, could well inspire tougher safety regulation in due course, according to experts. Britain's health and safety watchdog said it was considering launching an investigation into the incident, while union officials said the frequency of offshore safety lapses had become intolerable. [Reuters](#)

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USNORTHCOM

Bahamas: Malaria

28 March - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have recently received an official report of a confirmed case of malaria in a U.S. traveler to the island of Great Exuma, Bahamas. The traveler visited the island between February and March 2012 and reported no

additional recent travel outside of the U.S. An outbreak of malaria previously occurred on Great Exuma island, Bahamas in 2006, and the last documented case on the island was in 2008. Malaria is not endemic to the Bahamas, and no malaria cases have been reported from the country since then. Malaria control measures have been implemented; environmental controls have been put into operation, and on-island surveillance has been enhanced. Officials will report any new cases of malaria if they are discovered. Travelers should monitor their health during travel and for up to one year after return from the Bahamas for any symptoms of malaria, which are flu-like, such as fever and chills. If symptoms occur, the traveler should seek immediate medical care and inform their health-care provider of their travel to an area currently experiencing a malaria outbreak. [ProMED-mail](#)

U.S.: Babesiosis, a malaria-like disease, may be rising among elderly

27 March - Some individuals, particularly elderly individuals who are experiencing flu-like symptoms might be actually suffering from a malaria-like disease called babesiosis. A study by scientists at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and researchers from a consulting firm and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) found that elderly populations living in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Massachusetts had the highest rates of babesiosis among the elderly population and that such infections appear to be on rise in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The study, which focused on babesiosis diagnosed among elderly (65 years of age and older) Medicare beneficiaries from 2006 through 2008, found that that the disease was diagnosed in this population most often during the summer. Overall, 41% of all cases were diagnosed during the months of July and August. This seasonal concentration of diagnosed cases is probably due to the transmission season of Babesia parasites and activity of the tick that carries Babesia. In addition, people are more likely to spend time outdoors during these months and be exposed to the tick. [FDA](#)

U.S.: State cigarette excise taxes, 2010–2011

30 March - Increasing the price of cigarettes reduces the demand for cigarettes, thereby reducing youth smoking initiation and cigarette consumption and decreasing the prevalence of cigarette use in the United States overall, particularly among youths and young adults (1,2). The most common way governments have increased the price of cigarettes is by increasing cigarette excise taxes (1,2), which currently are imposed by all states and the District of Columbia (1). To update data on state cigarette excise taxes in 2009 (3), CDC conducted a survey of changes in state cigarette excise taxes during 2010–2011. During that period, eight states increased their cigarette excise taxes, and one state decreased its tax; as a result, the mean state tax increased from \$1.34 in 2009 to \$1.46 in 2011. Previous evidence indicates that further increases in cigarette excise taxes would be expected to result in further reductions in demand for cigarettes, decreasing smoking and associated morbidity and mortality (1,2). [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S.: Supreme Court questions validity of Obama healthcare law

27 March - Conservative justices of the US Supreme Court have questioned whether the US government has the power to penalise Americans who have no medical cover. The weighty question of the provision at the core of President Barack Obama's 2010 healthcare reform was under the microscope on day two of the hearing. The nine judges spent about two hours grilling attorneys on the hotly disputed individual mandate. A ruling on the politically explosive issue is expected by late June. That decision would come right in the thick of the campaign for November's presidential and congressional elections. The legal challenge has been brought by 26 US states which say the individual mandate violates the principles of freedom and liberty enshrined in the US constitution. Backers of the law see the provision, which does not take effect until 2014, as crucial for reducing the numbers of Americans living without health insurance. As the latest session got under way, protesters for and against the law once again held demonstrations on the steps of the court in Washington DC, reflecting the bitterly divisive passions aroused by the law. [BBC News](#)

U.S.: Tighter recommendations issued for blood cell transfusions



27 March - Aiming to cut back on unnecessary red blood cell transfusions, the American Association of Blood Banks has issued new recommendations that raise the bar for when patients should be considered in need of fresh blood. The guidelines seek to clarify the level at which a patient's red blood cell count can be viewed as dangerously low, thereby triggering a transfusion. An individual's red blood cell count level or "hemoglobin threshold" is deemed "healthy" when registering between 12 to 14 grams per deciliter. That hasn't changed. However, until now physicians would sometimes view patients with a hemoglobin threshold of 9 or 10 as being anemic enough to require a transfusion. But after an extensive review of the latest research, the association decided that such a "liberal" transfusion policy offered no additional protective health benefit to patients, and that most would do just as well if the threshold for transfusions was restricted to a lower level of 7 or 8 grams per deciliter in hospitalized, stable patients.

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Australia: Whooping cough vaccines warning

26 March – Doctors are warning people not to trust homeopathic whooping cough vaccines while health authorities fail to stop those advertising them during an epidemic that has claimed lives. An immunisation specialist at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital, Nigel

Crawford, said whooping cough could be fatal, especially for infants who had not been immunised. "There's no scientific evidence for homeopathic medicines either preventing whooping cough or treating it," he said. The warning comes after a record 13,000-plus cases last year, including two infant deaths. While the epidemic continues, public health expert Ken Harvey, of La Trobe University, said homeopaths were advertising alternative vaccines, including one group that had ignored warnings from the Therapeutic Goods Administration to stop. In a new complaint to the TGA and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Dr Harvey said Homeopathy Plus! was advertising a "safe and sensible" way of preventing and treating whooping cough. [The Sydney Morning Herald](#)

India: Cancer killing younger people, tobacco main cause

28 March - Cancer is killing younger people in India and affecting far more poor and less-educated villagers than wealthier, better-educated urban people, researchers reported on Wednesday. "Cancer appears earlier (in India) than say in [China](#) or the U.S., so it's a disease of the young," said the lead author of the paper, Professor Prahbat Jha at the Centre for Global Health Research at the University of Toronto in Canada. Jha said this could be because of India's younger population and the long-standing use of tobacco, which is the main cause of cancer in the country and responsible for 40 percent of cancers in men and 20 percent in women. In men, the top three cancer killers were oral, stomach and lung cancer, while in women, they were cervical, stomach and breast cancer. [Reuters](#)

Indonesia: Yogyakarta, Sidoarjo report rove beetle attacks

21 March - Yogyakarta and the East Java town of Sidoarjo have reported rove beetle attacks, following news of an outbreak of skin rashes and irritations in Surabaya caused by the insects locally referred to as "tomcats."... Insects, also believed to be the same tomcat bugs, were reported on Wednesday attacking residents of Celeban village in Umbulharjo subdistrict, Yogyakarta... On Tuesday, the Surabaya agriculture agency said rove beetles had attacked 12 out of the city's 31 subdistricts, causing an outbreak of skin rashes and irritations. Indonesia's Health Ministry director general for disease control and environmental health, Tjandra Yoga Aditama, said the beetles, *Paederus riparius*, did not bite, but secreted a poisonous fluid that might cause awful skin rashes. [Jakarta Globe](#)

Philippines: Broader access to paediatric cancer drugs

27 March - An NGO-government partnership in the Philippines has improved access to treatment for paediatric cancer, a leading cause of death in children aged 1-14, according to the Department of Health (DOH). "The first results suggest that our programme has raised the survival rate for childhood ALL [acute lymphoblastic leukaemia] from 20 to 50 percent. To achieve this, we addressed two issues: the high price of medicines in the country, and unaffordable out-of-pocket payments for families," Pia Cayetano, a parliamentarian, told IRIN in the capital region of Metro Manila. There are 3,500 cancer cases in children younger than 15 each year in the Philippines, and around half of them are ALL, a cancer that affects the blood and bone marrow, according to the Manila-based NGO [Cancer Warriors Foundation, Inc.](#) (CWFI). Nationwide, eight of every 10 children with paediatric cancer died

in 2008 (a total of 2,800 deaths). "The first obstacle to saving more children from ALL in the Philippines was the prices of drugs - among the highest in Asia," said Carmen Vallejo Auste, co-founder of CWFI. [IRIN](#)

Southeast Asia: Malaria, drug resistant

28 March - In Southeast Asia, drug-resistant falciparum malaria may have evolved resistance to another frontline therapy and established itself in new territory in western Thailand, according to the World Health Organization. The new area in Thailand joins previous hot spots in Cambodia, Viet Nam, and Myanmar, with the latter being badly equipped to stanch further spread. Despite containment efforts, the possibility this strain may spread to Africa, which has the most significant malaria burden, remains very real. Twice before, drug resistance has appeared 1st in Southeast Asia then migrated to Africa (which bears a punishing 90 percent of the world's malaria burden)... [ProMED-mail](#)

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USSOUTHCOM

In Haiti, bureaucratic delays stall mass cholera vaccinations

27 March - A hundred thousand people in Haiti are ready and waiting to get vaccinated against cholera. The vaccine is sitting in coolers. Vaccination teams are all trained. Willing recipients are registered and entered into databases. The impending mass vaccination project aims to show that vaccinating against cholera is feasible in Haiti. It has never been done in the midst of an ongoing cholera epidemic. So far, more than 530,000 Haitians have fallen ill with cholera, and more than 7,000 have died. But the vaccination campaign is [bogged down](#) in bureaucratic red tape. Meanwhile, the spring rains are beginning. Cholera cases are starting to climb, because the floods spread the cholera bacterium around. [NPR](#)

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