

7 December 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.

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The Role of Telehealth in an Evolving Health Care Environment - Workshop Summary

The IOM examined how the use of telehealth technology can fit into the U.S. health care system. The workshop focused on the potential for health care to serve geographically isolated individuals and extend the reach of scarce resources while also emphasizing the quality and value in the delivery of health care services. This document summarizes the workshop.



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U.S. MILITARY

Boston researchers find new evidence linking repeat concussions to permanent brain injury

2 December - The most extensive examination to date of deceased athletes' brains shows that most had signs of brain damage after suffering repeated head injuries—including two high school football players who died in their teens. Being published Monday by Boston University School of Medicine researchers, the study reports on the autopsies of 85 brain donors, most of them professional athletes... The work provides new insight into an Alzheimer's-like condition, called chronic traumatic encephalopathy, that is thought to be

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Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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caused by repeat concussions or blows to the head. The autopsies revealed extensive evidence of protein tangles called tau clogging brain tissue and causing the destruction of brain cells in football players, wrestlers, hockey players, boxers, and military veterans who served in combat zones. [Boston Globe](#)

Experts: Restricting troops' access to firearms is necessary to reduce rate of suicides



3 December - ... Why hasn't the Army or Defense Department been able to reduce the number of suicides? Experts say it's because efforts have ignored the most evidence-backed, proven prevention method: making suicide harder by restricting access to lethal means. "There are two ways to reduce suicide: You can

make it harder for them to die in an attempt, or you can heal underlying distress," said Dr. Matthew Miller, the associate director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center at the Harvard School of Public Health... "Means restriction," as it's called in public health, has been proven to reduce the suicide rate in a wide variety of places... Commanders typically disable or take the firearms of deployed troops identified as potentially suicidal, but they do not have that authority with private firearms kept off base. Last year, the National Rifle Association successfully lobbied Republican legislators to include in the annual defense authorization bill a measure barring commanders from collecting information about troops' personal weapons. [Stars & Stripes](#)

Lead limits on military firing ranges outdated, report says

4 December - Researchers commissioned by the Defense Department said Monday that decades-old limits on lead exposure are inadequate to protect the health of workers on military firing ranges. Moreover, the National Academy of Science reported, lead from ammunition fired on Army, Navy and Air Force ranges in the last five years has "frequently exceeded" those limits, "in some cases by several orders of magnitude." ... Under the 1978 standards, exposure to 50 micrograms of lead per square meter of air, or a blood lead level of 40 micrograms per deciliter, was considered acceptable. But the council's review of research since then showed that blood lead at much lower levels may cause neurologic, cardiovascular, reproductive and other problems. The council also reported "compelling evidence" of effects on the development of offspring in utero or during breastfeeding, which it said "raises additional concerns about exposures of women of childbearing age."

[Baltimore Sun](#)

Officials assess ballistic undergarment

29 November - The Army is one step closer to issuing an updated version of its ballistic underwear after a recent review and approval by the U.S. Army Public Health Command. Experts in the command's Health Hazard Assessment Program completed an occupational health assessment of the new protective outer garments and undergarments, and provided recommendations on how to minimize any risks... Although these undergarments look

similar to a set of men's bicycle pants, they are no ordinary underwear. "They are designed to use protective fabric and withstand injuries to the pelvic region that may result from the blast of an improvised explosive device," said [Robert] Booze. From 2003 to 2011, more than 600 Soldiers suffered injuries to the genital region during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
[Fort Campbell Courier](#)

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GLOBAL

Diabetes rates higher in countries using lots of high fructose corn syrup: study

27 November - In the United States and elsewhere, high fructose corn syrup is ubiquitous in soft drinks, sweet baked goods and many processed foods. But a new study shows that as a nation's rate of fructose intake rises, so do levels of type 2 diabetes. The study cannot prove a cause-and-effect link, but it does conclude that diabetes prevalence is about 20 percent higher in countries where use of the sweetener is high, relative to those where it is not. The association between high fructose corn syrup intake and diabetes risk persisted regardless of an individual's overall sugar intake or obesity status. According to the study authors, that suggests that there's something special about the sweetener that's boosting diabetes risk beyond what other sugars would. [Medline Plus](#)

Experts recommend closer scrutiny of radiation exposure from CT scans

28 November - Amid increasing fear of overexposure to radiation from CT scans, a panel of experts has recommended more research on the health effects of medical imaging and ways to reduce unnecessary CT tests, as well as industry standardization of CT machines. The recommendations, published in the November 2012 issue of *Radiology*, were developed at the Radiation Dose Summit, organized by the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB). [UC Davis Health System](#)

Experts say systematic approach key to fighting drug-resistant hospital infections

5 December - Hospitals can combat outbreaks caused by multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs) by promoting hand hygiene of healthcare workers, meticulous cleaning and disinfection of equipment, adherence to established infection-control practices, and better screening, two Harvard infectious disease experts said today. Writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*, Thomas J. Sandora, MD, MPH, and Donald A. Goldmann, MD, of Boston Children's Hospital and the Department of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, said, "Reliable adherence to basic infection control practices is the key to interrupting transmission in our hospitals." They add, "We urgently need screening media (or real-time

genomic tests) that can be deployed quickly to identify patients who are colonized with MDROs that surveillance networks have identified as emerging threats." They also encourage hospitals to design systems to facilitate adherence to best practices for stopping MDROs—such as "de-escalation" of antibiotic treatment—rather than to approach each infection individually. [CIDRAP](#)

For athletes, risks from ibuprofen use



5 December - Many active people use the painkiller ibuprofen on an almost daily basis. In surveys, up to 70 percent of distance runners and other endurance athletes report that they down the pills before every workout or competition, viewing the drug as a preemptive strike against muscle soreness. But a valuable new study joins growing evidence that ibuprofen and similar anti-inflammatory painkillers taken before a workout don't offer any benefit and may be causing disagreeable physical damage instead, particularly to the intestines. [New York Times](#)

Whooping cough vaccine less effective over time: study

27 November - Vaccination does safeguard children against whooping cough, but its protective effect seems to lessen over time, new research finds. The 2010 outbreak of whooping cough (pertussis) in California, which sickened more than 9,000 people and left 10 infants dead, prompted an examination of the current vaccine's effectiveness. That study concluded that the vaccine is effective but loses power over the years, leaving children 7 to 10 years old particularly susceptible. "The pertussis vaccine is our best protection against disease," said the study's lead author, Lara Misegades, an epidemiologist at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. "We found that unvaccinated children were eight times more likely to be a pertussis case than vaccinated children. Parents should ensure children complete the childhood series and make sure your children get the adolescent booster too." [Medline Plus](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

6 December:

- Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) incidence rates increased throughout the MHS, including increased outpatient visits due to ILI except in PACOM other beneficiaries (non-Servicemember).
- Influenza activity is at moderate levels across the overseas DoD laboratory surveillance network except in Europe where the activity is low; sites reported variable co-

circulation of influenza A/H1, A/H3, and B.

- The influenza vaccination coverage for the DoD (Active Duty component only) is 91%. [AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC sees signs of early, bad flu season

3 December – The early uptick in flu infections that are predominantly the H3N2 strain shows some worrisome parallels to the nation's last bad regular flu season in 2003-04, officials from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said today. The CDC's warning today that flu has picked up its pace about a month earlier than usual came during a media teleconference with reporters and at the start of its annual National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW), designed to encourage vaccination ahead of the main holiday season and the most active months for flu activity. CDC Director Thomas Frieden, MD, MPH, said though influenza is notoriously unpredictable, there are early signs that it could be a bad year. "It's time to get vaccinated," he said, adding that one promising development is that about 90% of the circulating flu viruses are well matched to the strains contained in the seasonal flu vaccine. [CIDRAP](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 47 (18-24 November 2012), influenza activity increased in the U.S. [FluView](#)

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During week 48 (25 November – 1 December 2012), 61 specimens were collected and tested from 20 locations. There was one A(H1N1pdm09) at Luke AFB, AZ and 23 influenza A/H3 viruses detected.
- Since Week 47, there has been an increase in influenza A/H3 virus isolated by USAFSAM and CDC. The CDC reports recent testing on viruses collected since 1 October 2012: 0.0% (0 of 122) of A/H3 viruses tested were resistant to oseltamivir/zanamivir
- To date, 490 specimens have been submitted and tested from 51 locations of which 72 were positive for influenza A (two co-infections of A/H3 & B, 65 A/H3, and five A(H1N1pdm09) and six were positive for influenza B. There have been 52 other respiratory viruses isolated (12 adenovirus, six RSV, four enterovirus, and 30 parainfluenza). [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#) (restricted access)

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

During week 47 (19-25 November 2012), all 28 countries reporting experienced low-intensity activity of influenza-like illness or acute respiratory infection. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Influenza Activity — United States, September 30–November 24, 2012

7 December - Influenza viruses were detected in the United States throughout the summer months (1), and activity increased steadily during October and November. Most influenza viruses characterized thus far this season are well matched to the 2012–13 vaccine viruses. This report summarizes U.S. influenza activity* during September 30–November 24, 2012.

[CDC](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 1 December 2012:

Influenza

A cluster of influenza A/H1N1(09) cases were identified at MCRD Parris Island in September – October.

Adenovirus

- Vaccination against types 4 and 7 adenovirus was instituted at all basic training centers by mid-November 2011 (week 45).
- FRI rates and the proportion of FRI cases positive for adenovirus have decreased markedly since vaccine was reintroduced.
- Type 14 adenovirus cases continue at MCRD Parris Island , though FRI rates remain low

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](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

24 November - Influenza activity has increased over the past two weeks, yet overall influenza and influenzalike illness (ILI) activity remains at baseline in US Army and civilian populations.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 47 were 12% higher than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Eighteen hospitalized influenza cases have been reported in DRSi this influenza season, but some represent emergency room visits.
- Acute Respiratory Disease at BCT sites: ARDS rates remain lower at all Army BCT sites compared to the same period last year.
- Viral specimens: During week 47, 127 of 602 (21%) clinical specimens tested were positive for respiratory pathogens. Influenza A was identified in 74 (58%) of these positive samples. Most of the Army influenza positive specimens were from SRMC (50%), primarily Ft. Gordon (51%) and Ft. Stewart (22%). [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Predicting, preventing, and controlling pandemics: Making the case for a strategic action plan

4 December – ... According to Dr. Morse and the other authors of the Lancet series, there are several stages in disease emergence and each change increases the likelihood of the pathogen making contact with humans. The spread of zoonoses is strongly affected by such human activities as global travel, changes in land use, and animal agriculture. Thus prevention will require intervention and planning on many fronts. Recent developments in modeling and technology, including revolutionary advances in communications, database design, and use of the latest molecular screening methods to identify previously unknown infectious agents, have put us on the verge of being able to predict the next zoonotic pandemic, according to Dr. Morse... "There is no question of whether we will have more zoonotic pandemics – the question is merely when, and where, the next pandemic will emerge," says Dr. Morse. "The challenge now is to establish whether and how researchers can intervene before a pathogen reaches the human population and develop appropriate triggers for action. Zoonotic diseases, by definition, should be a key mission of human health agencies, agricultural authorities and producers, and natural resource managers, all working cooperatively." [EurekAlert](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Pesticides in tap water, produce linked to food allergies



4 December - Pesticides in produce and drinking water may be playing a role in the increasing prevalence of food allergies, according to a new study. Researchers looked at 2,211 people and found those in the top 25% for urine concentrations of chemical dichlorophenols – used to chlorinate tap water and keep pests off produce - were also 80% more likely to have a food allergy. "Adults can develop food allergies even though they're not kids anymore," says allergist and study author Dr. Elina Jerschow. "Adult allergies to foods are on the rise. That certainly includes shellfish and fish allergies, but also peanuts. We don't know what influences this development. But having been exposed to dichlorophenols in our study suggests there could be some link." [CNN](#)

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WELLNESS

More drugs cited as a risky mix with grapefruit



27 November - Grapefruit sprinkled with a little sugar has just the right amount of kick for a morning meal. But when the bitter fruit is mixed with medication, things can get a bit tricky. Compounds in grapefruit can dramatically change how **some** popular drugs work in the body. And the number of drugs that can have severe side effects when combined with grapefruit has more than doubled in the last four years, says a study **published** Monday in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. **NPR**

New study shows how copper restricts the spread of global antibiotic-resistant infections

4 December - Horizontal gene transfer (HGT) in bacteria is largely responsible for the development of antibiotic-resistance, which has led to an increasing number of difficult-to-treat healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs). The newly-published paper, which appears in the journal *mBio*, shows that while HGT can take place in the environment, on frequently-touched surfaces, such as door handles, trolleys and tables, which are made from stainless steel – copper prevents this process from occurring and rapidly kills bacteria on contact. **PhysOrg**

Overprescribing of opioids impacts patient safety and public health

3 December - A Viewpoint article published recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* suggests that the clinical practice of prescribing amphetamines, opioids, and benzodiazepines to treat chronic pain may be contributing to the increase in fatal drug overdoses and the likelihood that those drugs will be diverted to the illegal market... "More people in the U.S. die from a drug overdose than they do from motor vehicle accidents and more of those deaths are caused by prescription opioids than those attributable to cocaine and heroin combined," said [G. Caleb] Alexander, associate professor of Epidemiology at the Bloomberg School and co-director of the new Johns Hopkins Center for Drug Safety and Effectiveness. There are measures currently in place to monitor the increasing epidemic of opioid abuse, including limits on the number of opioid prescriptions covered by insurers, requirements that these drugs be supplied through a single physician or pharmacy, and state prescription drug monitoring programs. However, the Viewpoint conveys that unless there is a clinical shift in the widespread use of these medicines, efforts to reduce opioid abuse may not succeed. **Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Public Health News Center**

Psychiatrists OK vast changes to diagnosis manual

1 December - For the first time in almost two decades the nation's psychiatrists are changing the guidebook they use to diagnose mental disorders. Among the most controversial proposed changes: Dropping certain familiar terms like Asperger's disorder and dyslexia and calling frequent, severe temper tantrums a mental illness. The board of trustees for the American Psychiatric Association voted Saturday in suburban Washington, D.C., on scores of revisions that have been in the works for several years. Details will come next May when the group's fifth diagnostic manual is published. [Yahoo! News](#)

Running farther, faster and longer can kill you

3 December - ... There is accumulating evidence that, over the long term, endurance sports like distance running might actually hurt the heart, an editorial in the British journal *Heart* argues. And that's especially true for aging runners, says the editorial's lead author Dr. James O'Keefe, head of preventive cardiology at the Mid America Heart Institute at Saint Luke's Health System. O'Keefe points to studies that show subtle signs of heart damage in marathon runners tested right after their races have been run. And backing that up, he says, is data from the "Iron Mouse" study that found scarring in the hearts of mice forced to run long distances every day for four months. The good news is that the mice seemed to improve after they stopped running and were allowed to return to normal rodent life. But O'Keefe is worried that distance runners who keep at it year after year after year don't ever give their hearts a chance to heal. [Health on TODAY](#)

'Synthetic pot' sending thousands of young people to ER

4 December - U.S. emergency rooms tended to more than 11,400 cases of drug-related health complications specifically linked to the use of synthetic marijuana in 2010, a new government report reveals. Released Tuesday, The DAWN Report from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) attaches a hard figure to the potential health risks associated with the growing use of synthetic marijuana. The report also puts such use in context, observing, for example, that actual marijuana use accounted for far more ER visits (exceeding 461,000) in the same time frame. [U.S. News and World Report](#)

Tobacco companies ordered to publicly admit deception on smoking dangers

28 November - Tobacco companies have been ordered by a federal judge to publicly admit, through advertisements and package warnings, that they deceived American consumers for decades about the dangers of smoking. Federal Judge Gladys Kessler issued her ruling Tuesday in one of the last legal steps settling liability in the long-running government prosecution of cigarette makers. "By ensuring that consumers know that [tobacco companies] have misled the public in the past on the issue of secondhand smoke in addition to putting forth the fact that a scientific consensus on this subject exists," said

Kessler, "defendants will be less likely to attempt to argue in the future that such a consensus does not exist." [CNN](#)

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USAFRICOM

Ebola in Uganda - update

30 November - As of 28 November 2012, the Ministry of Health in Uganda reported 7 cases (6 confirmed, 1 probable) with Ebola haemorrhagic fever in Luweero and Kampala districts. Of these cases, 4 died. Field teams continue to investigate cases alerted to them from the communities. The major challenge faced in some communities is the belief that witch-craft and not Ebola was the cause of deaths, despite ongoing intensive awareness campaigns. Social mobilization teams are working closely with traditional healers and religious leaders to raise awareness on prevention and control of the disease...

Note: The total number of cases reported on 23 November 2012 was 10 (6 confirmed, 4 probable) Probable cases that tested negative for Ebola have been classified as Non-Cases and excluded from the case counts. [WHO](#)

Nato forces 'attack Afghan health clinic'



6 December - Nato forces stormed into a clinic in central Afghanistan, damaging doors, windows and medical equipment, before using it as a jail and military command centre, in violation of the Geneva conventions, according to the aid group that runs the facility. Nato and Afghan troops were dropped off by helicopters late one October evening and headed straight to the clinic, according to the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, which has published details of the assault on their small centre in Wardak province, a few dozen miles south-west of Kabul. The soldiers knocked down a wall to enter the building, damaged doors, windows, examination beds and other equipment, and detained clinical staff and civilians inside. And for the next two and a half days they brought dozens, maybe hundreds of prisoners through the clinic, using it as a jail, logistics hub and for mortar fire, contravening the Geneva conventions, which protect medical centres. [Guardian](#)

'Transport infrastructure' determines spread of HIV subtypes in Africa

4 December - Road networks and geographic factors affecting "spatial accessibility" have a major impact on the spread of HIV across sub-Saharan Africa, according to a study published online by the journal AIDS... Using sophisticated mapping techniques and detailed databases, Dr Andrew J. Tatem of the University of Florida and colleagues have found "coherent spatial patterns in HIV-1 subtype distributions" across Africa. The

researchers write, "A comprehensive understanding and evidence-base on accessibility, travel and mobility in resource poor settings would...provide a valuable resource for the strategic planning of disease control." ... In addition to roads, the data included a wide range of factors affecting "spatial accessibility," such as land cover, settlement locations, bodies of water, and topography. Sophisticated models were used to calculate not just the distance between locations, but also the ease of traveling from one place to another. Even simply laying a chart of HIV subtypes over a map of travel times between settled areas makes the link between spatial accessibility and HIV subtype "clearly evident." [EurekAlert](#)

Zambia meeting addresses health emergency response gaps in Africa

5 December - A 4-day regional forum for African governments, agencies, and other stakeholders is under way in Zambia to discuss unmet needs in surveillance and response capacities for public health emergencies in Africa. A press release yesterday from the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa (WHO/AFRO) says that many African countries were unable to meet the original Jun 15, 2012, deadline set under the International Health Regulations (IHR) for developing core capacities for all-hazards emergency response, and the deadline has been extended until Jun 15, 2014. The WHO said gaps and weaknesses exist in core capacities, including legislation, preparedness, risk communication, human resources, food safety, and chemical and radionuclear attack. The goal of the meeting, which brings together 80 participants from 22 countries, is to allow the sharing of experiences and challenges in IHR implementation and to identify priorities and next steps where gaps exist. Dr. Patrick Chikusu, deputy minister of health in Zambia, said the delay in strengthening the region's core capacities is a major concern for global health security. [CIDRAP](#)

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USCENTCOM

Novel coronavirus infection - update

30 November - In addition to the fatal case of novel coronavirus in Saudi Arabia reported to WHO on 28 November, two fatal cases in Jordan have been reported to WHO today, bringing the total of laboratory-confirmed cases to nine. The latest confirmed case from Saudi Arabia occurred in October 2012 and is from the family cluster of the two cases confirmed earlier. The two cases from Jordan occurred in April 2012. At that time, a number of severe pneumonia cases occurred in the country and the Ministry of Health (MOH) Jordan promptly requested a WHO Collaborating Centre for Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases (NAMRU – 3) team to immediately assist in the laboratory investigation. The NAMRU-3 team went to Jordan and tested samples from this cluster of cases. On 24 April 2012 the NAMRU-3 team informed the MOH that all samples had tested negative for known coronaviruses and other respiratory viruses. As the novel coronavirus had not yet

been discovered, no specific tests for it were available. In October 2012, after the discovery of the novel coronavirus, stored samples were sent by MOH Jordan to NAMRU-3. In November 2012 NAMRU-3 provided laboratory results that confirmed two cases of infection with the novel coronavirus. [WHO](#)

Pakistan: Tackling Pakistan's population time bomb



5 December - A high birth rate is not making life any easier for Pakistan's 180 million people, already affected by political instability, economic stagnation and natural disasters. Internal pressures in the country with the world's sixth largest population are likely to get worse before they get better: At 2.03 percent Pakistan has the highest population growth rate in South Asia, and its total fertility rate, or the number of children born per woman, is also the highest in the region, at 3.5 percent. By 2030, the government projects that Pakistan's population will exceed 242 million. The failure to adequately manage demographic growth puts further pressure on the current population, who already lack widespread basic services and social development.

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USEUCOM

French sperm count 'falls by a third'

4 December - The sperm count of French men fell by a third between 1989 and 2005, a study suggests. The semen of more than 26,600 French men was tested in the study, reported in the journal Human Reproduction. The number of millions of spermatozoa per millilitre fell by 32.3%, a rate of about 1.9% a year. And the percentage of normally shaped sperm fell by 33.4%. The average sperm count remained within the fertile range, but experts want to see more research into possible causes. [BBC News](#)

Greece: Basic hygiene at risk in debt-stricken hospitals

4 December - - Greek hospitals are in such dire straits that staff are failing to keep up basic disease controls such as using gloves and gowns, threatening a rise in multidrug-resistant infections, according to Europe's top health official. Greece already has one of the worst problems in Europe with hospital-acquired infections, and disease experts fear this is being made worse by an economic crisis that has cut health care staffing levels and hurt standards of care. With fewer doctors and nurses to look after more patients, and hospitals running low on cash for supplies, risks are being taken even with basic hygiene, said Marc Sprenger, director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). [Reuters](#)

Portugal: Dengue

5 December - The dengue fever outbreak that began in early October [2012] on the island of Madeira in the Autonomous Region of Madeira continues to increase in numbers, according to the latest case count from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on 3 Dec [2012; available at <http://bit.ly/RCbNU4>]. European health authorities report 1819 dengue cases as of 25 Nov [2012]. This is up from 1672 cases reported one week prior. [ProMED-mail](#)

United Kingdom: Whooping cough cases this year are 10 times peak in 2008

30 November - More than 7,700 whooping cough cases have been reported in England and Wales this year, almost 10 times the number seen in the last peak year for the illness in 2008, the Health Protection Agency said. The number of cases in October reached 1,614, bringing the total for the year to 7,728 including 13 infant deaths, the agency said today in an e-mailed statement. Almost 800 cases were reported in 2008, according to the HPA. More than 80 percent of the 2012 cases are in people age 15 and older. [Bloomberg](#)

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USNORTHCOM

Puerto Rico: Take-home lead exposure among children with relatives employed at a battery recycling facility

30 November - Among 68 children aged <6 years, 11 (16%) had confirmed blood lead levels (BLLs) ≥ 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, the BLL at which CDC recommended individual intervention to reduce BLLs in 2010, and 39 (57%) children aged <6 years had venous or capillary BLLs ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, the reference value for elevated BLLs in children established by CDC in 2012. To determine whether take-home lead exposure contributed to the children's BLLs of ≥ 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, vehicle and household environmental samples were collected and analyzed. Eighty-five percent of vehicle dust samples and 49% of home dust samples exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) level of concern of ≥ 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ (3.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^2$). EPA began clean-up of employee homes and vehicles, focusing first on homes with children with BLLs ≥ 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$. EPA also required that the company set up shower facilities, shoe washes, and clean changing areas at the battery recycling facility. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S.: 18 treated for chemical exposure after New Jersey train derail

30 November - Residents of three southern New Jersey towns were told to stay indoors and 18 people were treated for exposure after a bridge collapsed Friday, causing a freight train

to derail and release a potentially hazardous chemical, officials said. Three train cars dropped from the bridge into a creek in Paulsboro in Gloucester County at about 7 a.m. and were leaking, according to the statement that authorities e-mailed to reporters. At least one of the cars that fell into the creek is believed to have contained vinyl chloride, which can cause dizziness and harm breathing. The cargo in the other cars was unknown... Eighteen people with respiratory issues reported to Underwood Memorial Hospital, mainly complaining of sore throats and breathing problems, officials said. [Los Angeles Times](#)

U.S.: Additional contamination identified in medical products from New England Compounding Center

3 December - ... CDC and FDA have identified additional microbial contamination in unopened vials of betamethasone, cardioplegia, and triamcinolone solutions distributed and recalled from NECC. These include bacteria known as *Bacillus*, and fungal species including *Aspergillus tubingensis*, *Aspergillus fumigatus*, *Cladosporium* species, and *Penicillium* species. Although rare, some of the identified *Bacillus* species can be human pathogens. Some of the fungal organisms identified, particularly *Aspergillus fumigatus*, are known to cause disease in humans. It is not known how product contamination with these organisms could affect patients clinically. [CDC](#)

U.S. birth rate falls to a record low

29 November - The U.S. birth rate dipped in 2011 to the lowest ever recorded, led by a plunge in births to immigrant women since the onset of the Great Recession. The overall U.S. birth rate, which is the annual number of births per 1,000 women in the prime childbearing ages of 15 to 44, declined 8% from 2007 to 2010. The birth rate for U.S.-born women decreased 6% during these years, but the birth rate for foreign-born women plunged 14%—more than it had declined over the entire 1990–2007 period.¹ The birth rate for Mexican immigrant women fell even more, by 23%... Despite the recent decline, foreign-born mothers continue to give birth to a disproportionate share of the nation's newborns, as they have for at least the past two decades. The 23 percent share of all births to foreign-born mothers in 2010 was higher than the 13 percent immigrant share of the U.S. population, and higher than the 17 percent share of women ages 15–44 who are immigrants. [Pew Research Center](#)

U.S.: Behind a call that kept nursing home patients in storm's path

2 December – [During Hurricane Sandy, the] recommendation that thousands of elderly, disabled and mentally ill residents remain in more than 40 nursing homes and adult homes in flood-prone areas of New York City had calamitous consequences. At least 29 facilities in Queens and Brooklyn were severely flooded. Generators failed or were absent. Buildings were plunged into a cold, wet darkness, with no access to power, water, heat and food. While no immediate deaths were reported, it took at least three days for the Fire Department, the National Guard and ambulance crews from around the country to rescue over 4,000 nursing home and 1,500 adult home residents. Without working elevators, many

had to be carried down slippery stairwells... The decision not to empty the nursing homes and adult homes in the mandatory evacuation area was one of the most questionable by the authorities during Hurricane Sandy. And an investigation by The New York Times found that the impact was worsened by missteps that officials made in not ensuring that these facilities could protect residents. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: Chlorine gas release associated with employee language barrier — Arkansas, 2011

7 December - ... This chlorine release and its resultant health effects were preventable. OSHA issued the owner of the poultry plant a citation for not ensuring that chemical hazard communication training was understood by all employees. The OSHA Hazard Communication Standard states, "Employers shall provide employees with effective information and training on hazardous chemicals in their work area at the time of their initial assignment, and whenever a new physical or health hazard the employees have not previously been trained about is introduced into their work area."** Under the standard, employers also are expected to communicate work instructions and information on workplace hazards to employees tailored to the employees' language and education level (3). The growing presence of Spanish-speaking workers in the United States, and the high rates of morbidity and fatalities among Hispanic workers, point to the need for improved workplace instruction and training to ensure employee comprehension (4). [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S.: Valero says worker died after chemical exposure

3 December - One of two workers exposed to a hazardous chemical at Valero Energy Corp's Tennessee refinery early on Monday has died, the company said. Both were hurt when a small window on a unit ruptured at the 180,000 barrels-per-day (bpd) Memphis refinery, spokesman Bill Day said. He said the sight glass failed on an alkylation unit, injuring a Valero employee and a contractor. The Valero employee, who not identified, later died, Day said. Memphis Fire Department spokesman Lt. Wayne Cooke and Day said responders were investigating what chemicals were behind the glass that ruptured. Sources familiar with refinery operations said the chemical was hydrogen fluoride, which can cause severe burns if in contact with skin or breathed into lungs. When dissolved into water, the chemical also can be called hydrofluoric acid. [Reuters](#)

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Australia: Obesity strategy a 'wasteful failure'



2 December – The political response to Australia's obesity epidemic has been a "failure", and \$49 million spent on healthy lifestyle advertising campaigns was a "waste of taxpayers' money", a key government adviser claims. Professor Paul Zimmet, a member of former prime minister Kevin Rudd's preventive health taskforce, says the government's strategy to fight the fat is "weak and fragmented"...

Professor Zimmet, director emeritus at Melbourne's Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, will argue there is no political will to reduce obesity. While congratulating the government for its action on tobacco control, he claims it has taken the "easy option" on obesity, with ineffective social marketing campaigns. [Sydney Morning Herald](#)

India: Appalling condition of primary healthcare services

6 December - Suffering from unstable angina, asthma or dysentery? The chances of correct diagnosis and treatment in both rural and urban areas by private and public care providers are dismal. The shocking state of primary healthcare services in both private and public clinics in urban (Delhi) and rural (villages in Madhya Pradesh) areas has been highlighted in a scientifically carried out study published a few days ago in Health Affairs. What is all the more appalling is that the 305 healthcare providers tested in urban and rural India were presented with nearly uncomplicated conditions — unstable angina, asthma or dysentery — and for which there exist well established medical protocols with clear triage, management and treatment checklists developed by the government's National Rural Health Mission.

[The Hindu](#)

Nepal: Pneumonia, children

5 December - Pneumonia is on the rise in Udayapur district due to cold weather for the past few days. Pneumonia has been seen in children in Triyuga Municipality and in Beltar, in the eastern part of the district. According to employees at Beltar Primary Health Center, some 50 children from Beltar with pneumonia visited local health institutions for treatment within the past week. Janak Karki of the Sagarmatha Higher Secondary School said that most of the students at the school have been suffering from pneumonia due to increasing cold weather and have remained absent from school. District Public Health Officer Duniyalal Yadav said that a number of children who were suffering from pneumonia visited the District Hospital in Udayapur for treatment. [ProMED-mail](#)

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Cuba: Cholera, diarrhea, and dysentery update

26 November - The cholera epidemic that has been sweeping across Cuba since last June 2012 has spread to the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Guantanamo, and Holguin, with dozens of people hospitalized and some municipalities in critical situation, reports from the island the independent news agency "Hablemos Press". According to a report of the agency's director, Roberto de Jesus Guerra Perez, sources in the public health sector and residents of the eastern zone confirmed the proliferation of the epidemic, and pointed out that the province of Guantanamo could be declared in quarantine. A resident in the city of Guantanamo confirmed that there are about 206 cases of cholera in the province. Figures revealed by this citizen were obtained from an employee of the Ministry of Public Health that requested their identity not be revealed, says Hablemos Press. [ProMED-mail](#)

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