11 August 2017

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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Bill banning VA's dog testing program draws an opponent: Disabled veterans

9 August - Groups representing disabled veterans and medical researchers warned this week that legislation banning most medical experimentation on dogs at the Department of Veterans Affairs would deprive veterans of needed medical breakthroughs. ... Rep. Dave Brat, R-Va., proposed an amendment to a package of four spending bills for the next fiscal year, which included VA funding. Brat's amendment banned any VA funding for testing or other activities that bring certain levels of pain to dogs. The amendment passed overwhelmingly, in a voice vote, after a debate in which no one spoke against it. ... "VA's animal research program has saved lives in the past and will save lives in the future," said Dr. Michael Fallon, the VA's chief veterinary medical officer. "It's important for people to recognize that canine research is essential to developing crucial medical advancements to help veterans and non-veterans alike." Washington Examiner

Court deals major blow to veterans suing over burn pits

5 August - A federal judge has dismissed a major lawsuit against a defense contractor by veterans and their family members, over burn pit operations in Iraq and Afghanistan that plaintiffs said caused them chronic and sometimes deadly respiratory diseases and cancer. In the decision, U.S. District Court Judge Roger W. Titus wrote that the company, KBR, could not be held liable for what was essentially a military decision to use burn pits for waste disposal. Titus said holding the Pentagon responsible was outside of his jurisdiction. ... The dismissal -- the second by Titus in the case -- deals a major blow to the more than 700 veterans, family members and former KBR employees who brought the suit. Military.com

For veterans mustard-gassed in secret tests, help now sits on president's desk

3 August - Decades after the U.S. government exposed service members to chemical weapons in secret experiments, lawmakers have advanced a measure intended to make it easier for those World War II veterans to obtain compensation. The bill, known as the Arla Harrell Act, advanced to President Trump’s desk after Senate approval Wednesday. ... The move comes more than two years after an NPR investigation revealed the Department of Veterans Affairs had broken its promise to seek out and compensate those men who had incurred permanent injuries from mustard gas testing. Now declassified, that long-secret program sought to determine the effects of certain chemical weapons, often by separating
Incidence of gastrointestinal infections among U.S. active component service members stationed in the U.S. compared to U.S. civilians, 2012–2014

July 2017 - During the study period, 99% of inpatient and outpatient [Gastrointestinal (GI)] encounters were reported as nonspecific GI infection (13,331 cases per 100,000 people), leaving only a small percentage of cases attributed to specific causes. The five most common organisms associated with GI infections were Campylobacter (10.30 per 100,000 people), nontyphoidal Salmonella (7.43), Giardia (3.15), Shigella (2.11), and norovirus (1.25). The civilian population incidence rates of foodborne diseases during the same time period are significantly greater than incidence rates within the U.S. active component for all select bacterial and parasitic pathogens, except Campylobacter. Nonspecific gastroenteritis incidence increased during winter months, which is similar to the seasonal pattern for viruses such as norovirus. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

McClellan base polluted drinking water supply, districts say. They want $1.4B from feds

9 August - In a sweeping legal fight that could affect drinking water supplies for thousands of Sacramento-area residents, two water districts near the old McClellan Air Force Base are suing the federal government for $1.4 billion to clean up the cancer-causing chemical hexavalent chromium from the area’s groundwater supplies. The lawsuits, filed by the Sacramento Suburban Water District and the Rio Linda Elverta Community Water District, name the U.S. Air Force and 10 major firms that were involved in supplying chromium products and chemicals to the base for decades as workers there performed aircraft maintenance and other duties. … [T]heir lawsuits and claims say they will need $1.4 billion to clean up polluted wells, install treatment equipment and replace wells that have been decommissioned because of the presence of the chemical. Stars and Stripes

New ‘golden hour’ medical treatment system is designed for hot climates

6 August - The Army is testing a new medical treatment kit designed to keep blood and other vital supplies cool in hot climates. The Golden Hour Ambulatory Rescue Pack is named for the “golden hour,” the time after a battlefield wound that can be the most crucial to saving lives, Army officials said. Soldiers can store and carry medical supplies in the ruggedized Golden HARP, and monitor the temperatures of the contents. The kit can be attached to any MOLLE frame pack to be carried into austere locations, officials say. … In July, Golden HARP was sent to the Army’s Medical Materiel Agency for users to try out and provide feedback. … The pack has a battery that can be charged by the system’s own solar panel, and with eight hours of
sunlight per day, the Golden HARP can maintain its temperature indefinitely without recharging the battery if ambient temperature is below 90 degrees F, officials said.

Army Times

Troops at risk for suicide not getting needed care, report finds

7 August - Pentagon health care providers failed to perform critical follow-up for many troops diagnosed with depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome who also were at high risk for suicide, according to a new study released Monday by the RAND Corp. Just 30% of troops with depression and 54% with PTSD received appropriate care after they were deemed at risk of harming themselves. The report, commissioned by the Pentagon, looked at the cases of 39,000 troops who had been diagnosed in 2013 with depression, PTSD or both conditions. ... “The most immediate action — removal of firearms — can help to reduce risk of suicide attempts.” The report, titled Quality of Care for PTSD and Depression in the Military Health System, also found that one third of troops with PTSD were prescribed with a medication harmful to their condition. USA TODAY

Two Brooke Army Medical Center staff test positive for bacteria linked to Legionnaires' disease

9 August - Two staff at Brooke Army Medical Center have tested positive for a bacteria that causes Legionnaires’ disease, a fatal and fast-spreading type of pneumonia. Legionella bacteria is spread when people inhale contaminated mist or vapor. ... The two BAMC staffers work in an administrative building, not the center's hospital. Those working in the potentially contaminated building have been moved. San Antonio Current

VA announces expansion of ‘anywhere to anywhere’ health care services

3 August - In partnership with the White House Office of American Innovation, the Veterans Affairs Department announced an expansion of its telehealth services or "anywhere to anywhere" health care. The department will issue a joint regulation with the Office of American Innovation and Justice Department to allow all VA providers to administer telehealth services to veterans anywhere in the country. Existing telehealth programs provided care to more than 700,000 veterans last year and covered at least 50 different specialties, from dentistry to dermatology. "We’re removing regulations that have prevented us from doing this,” VA Secretary David Shulkin said during an Aug. 3 White House announcement. “We’re removing geography as a barrier so that we can speed up access to veterans and really honor our commitment to them.” Federal News Radio

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Classified Version of the Weekly Update

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Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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

GLOBAL

Flame retardants linked to lower child IQ
3 August - Increased exposure among pregnant women to a class of flame-retardant chemicals found in older furniture and other everyday consumer products is linked to lower IQs in their children, UCSF researchers found in a study that is certain to further ignite the debate over the chemicals. Examining data from nearly 3,000 mother-child pairs from previous studies done around the world, the authors concluded that every tenfold increase in women's exposure during pregnancy to chemicals known as polybrominated diphenyl ethers, or PBDEs, was associated with a 3.7-point decrease in their children’s IQ. SFGate

Gene-editing success brings pig-to-human transplants closer to reality
10 August - The idea of solving the human organ shortage with pigs has tantalized surgeons for decades. … [O]ne major hurdle that has continued to vex any such cross-species transplants, or xenotransplants, has been the threat of transmitting viruses that can infect people and pigs alike: The latter's genome includes 25 so-called retroviruses that apparently do nothing to porkers but might transmit diseases to people—especially immune-compromised transplant patients. … Today scientists in Massachusetts announced that by using the CRISPR–Cas9 gene-editing system they were able to inactivate all 25 viruses in the pig genome, yielding seemingly healthy piglets and moving research one step closer to a future of xenotransplantation. Scientific American

New data-sharing platform aims to boost antibiotic discovery
9 August - The Pew Charitable Trusts has announced plans to launch a new cloud-based computing platform that it hopes will "spark" the discovery of new antibiotics to defeat drug-resistant gram-negative bacteria. The publicly available database and interactive data-sharing tool, called the Shared Platform for Antibiotic Research and Knowledge (SPARK), will include curated antibiotic discovery data from accessible sources, along with unpublished data, related content, and expert analysis. The hope is that SPARK will allow scientists from around the world who are working on antibiotic discovery to share data, gain new insights, collaborate, and ultimately advance research on molecules that can penetrate and stay inside gram-negative bacteria—the toughest and most pressingly important bacterial pathogens. CIDRAP

New device can heal with a single touch, and even repair brain injuries
7 August - A new device developed at The Ohio State University can start healing organs in a "fraction of a second," researchers say. The technology, known as Tissue Nanotransfection (TNT), has the potential to save the lives of car crash victims and even deployed soldiers.
injured on site. It’s a dime-sized silicone chip that "injects genetic code into skin cells, turning those skin cells into other types of cells required for treating diseased conditions," according to a release. In lab tests, one touch of TNT completely repaired injured legs of mice over three weeks by turning skin cells into vascular cells. And, it not only works on skin cells, it can restore any type of tissue, Chandan Sen, director of the Center for Regenerative Medicine and Cell-Based Therapies, said. For example, the technology restored brain function in a mouse who suffered a stroke by growing brain cells on its skin. ... There are no known side effects to TNT and treatment is less than a second, Sen said. **USA TODAY**

**Rapid malaria tests work, but with unexpected drawbacks**

7 August - Rapid diagnostic tests have greatly improved malaria treatment in the last decade, but they also had some unexpected bad consequences, a large new study has found. As hoped, the tests — which use only a drop of blood and provide results in about 15 minutes — substantially decreased how many patients with fever were incorrectly given or sold malaria drugs when they did not have malaria. But the number of patients who got antibiotics instead shot up, even if they were not tested for bacterial infections — a practice that encourages the emergence of drug-resistant germs. The study also found that a disturbing number of people who tested positive for malaria still did not get malaria drugs. At five of eight testing sites in Africa, more than 20 percent did not. **The New York Times**

**Review: Cholera vaccines effective for adults, much less so for children**

9 August - A new review of the research literature ... shows that cholera vaccines provide substantial protection for adults but provide significantly less protection for children under age 5, a population particularly at risk for dying from this diarrheal disease. The review, which considered seven clinical trials and six observational studies, found that the standard two-dose vaccine regimen reduced the risk of getting cholera on average by 58 percent for adults but only by 30 percent for children under age 5. The findings could help inform policymakers on how and when to use the vaccine, particularly in outbreak settings such as the ongoing epidemic in Yemen. **Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News**

**Shadow of leprosy falls again as experts claim millions of cases go undiagnosed**

3 August - Millions of new leprosy cases are going undiagnosed and untreated, 15 years after one of the world’s most feared and infamous diseases was declared to be virtually eliminated. Experts believe the reported number of new leprosy cases each year – as published by the World Health Organization – has been falling well short of the true total, meaning that millions of people have not been receiving the essential treatment that would prevent disability. The WHO reports that there have been between 200,000 and 300,000 new cases detected globally every year since 2005. However, the true number of new cases
is likely to be double these figures. The Guardian

Study: Ear infection profile shows change after pneumococcal vaccine introduction

8 August - Ear infections in young children have declined over the past decade since pneumococcal conjugate vaccines were introduced, and though infections from *Streptococcus pneumoniae*—the main cause of such infections—have dropped, other pathogens have stepped in as the main sources, researchers reported yesterday. The findings ... provide one of the first glimpses of the epidemiology of acute otitis media (AOM) since the 1980s, before pneumococcal conjugate 7 and 13 vaccines were introduced. Since then, experts have tightened the clinical definition of and changed treatment guidance for AOM, the most common condition treated with antibiotics, a concern given rising antibiotic resistance levels. ... When the authors looked at the type of pathogens in middle-ear fluid, they found that since pneumococcal vaccines were introduced, the main source of infection had shifted from *S pneumoniae* to *Haemophilus influenzae* and *Moraxella catarrhalis*. The team found no evidence of a trend toward increased culture-negative results from middle-ear fluid sampling since childhood pneumococcal vaccines were introduced. CIDRAP

U.N. urges action to avert famine threatening 20 million people worldwide

9 August - The U.N. Security Council on Wednesday called on warring parties in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and northeastern Nigeria to allow humanitarian aid access and urged countries to donate more money to avert famines threatening 20 million people. In a statement drafted by Sweden, the 15-member council expressed "deep concern that ongoing conflicts and violence have devastating humanitarian consequences and hinder an effective humanitarian response in the short, medium and long term, and are therefore a major cause of famine" in these four countries. Reuters

Well-maintained bridges and roads may be critical to your health

6 August - ... While robust technologies shore up America’s supply chains, including the delivery of medications and other health supplies, other areas of infrastructure are not only deteriorating but also do not address imminent, or recurring, public health threats. ... In the late 1800s and early 1900s, cities throughout the U.S. eradicated the spread of waterborne diseases, such as typhoid, by investing in water and sanitation improvements. However, as the Flint water crisis of 2014 illustrated, America’s infrastructure presents one of the greatest threats to the health of Americans. Beach adds that outdated infrastructure has contributed to an estimated 240,000 water main breaks each year.” ... According to the 2017 Infrastructure Report Card, the average U.S. bridge is 43 years old and there are, on average, 188 million trips each day across structurally deficient American bridges. With each passing
car and each passing day, these bridges become more life-threatening. Scientific American

**Work exposures linked with RA, especially in men**

10 August - Men whose occupations involve exposure to potentially noxious airborne agents were at increased risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis (RA), Swedish researchers reported. Among men who worked as bricklayers or concrete workers, odds of developing RA seropositive for anti-citrullinated protein antibodies (ACPA) were almost tripled (OR 2.9, 95% CI 1.4-5.7), according to Camilla Bengtsson, PhD, of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, and colleagues. Elevated risks for ACPA-positive RA also were seen for men working as material handling operators (OR 2.4, 95% CI 1.3-4.4) and in electrical and electronics occupations (OR 2.1, 95% CI 1.1-3.8). MedPage Today

**Zika virus-associated neonatal birth defects surveillance — Texas, January 2016—July 2017**

11 August - ... During January 1, 2016–July 31, 2017, a total of 219 pregnant women with laboratory evidence of possible recent Zika virus infection were identified in Texas, including 49 (22%) with laboratory-confirmed Zika virus infection. One woman was infected in Texas; all others were exposed outside the United States and its territories. Among the 219 pregnancies, outcomes were recorded for 185 (84%), including 182 live-born infants and three pregnancy losses that occurred at any time during gestation. Among the remaining 34 pregnant women, 20 have an estimated due date which has not yet passed, four have an estimated due date which has passed but no pregnancy outcomes have been reported, and for 10, there was no reported estimated due date. ... Zika virus–associated birth defects were documented in 15 (8%) pregnancies (14 live-born infants and one fetal loss), including six (17%) of the 36 infants or fetal losses delivered by women with laboratory-confirmed Zika virus infection. Ten infants or fetuses had microcephaly; five of those with microcephaly had additional birth defects, including holoprosencephaly, hydranencephaly, craniosynostosis, and clubfeet. Zika virus–associated birth defects identified in the remaining three infants included holoprosencephaly, cataracts, and ventral pons hypoplasia. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

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A look back at the 2015–2016 flu season

9 August - ... To evaluate the bottom line on the 2015–2016 flu season, researchers enrolled a sample of children and adults with acute respiratory symptoms who presented to U.S. ambulatory care clinics from November 2015 through mid-April 2016. Of 6879 participants, 50% had received some form of flu vaccine at least 2 weeks prior to illness, and 19% tested
positive for influenza A or B. Among those with confirmed flu, 494 had been vaccinated. Overall vaccine efficacy was estimated at 48%, ranging from 26% in 50- to 64-year-olds to 59% in 9- to 17-year-olds. When data were parsed by vaccine type, overall efficacy of the quadrivalent inactivated vaccine was slightly, but not significantly, higher than that of the trivalent inactivated vaccine (54% vs. 41%); the quadrivalent vaccine did appear to offer significant protection against an influenza B strain. In contrast, efficacy of the live attenuated vaccine administered to children was negligible (4%). NEJM Watch

CDC: Flu View - Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report

2016-2017 Influenza Season Week 30 ending July 29, 2017 -

Novel Influenza A Virus:
One additional human infection with a novel influenza A virus was detected in Ohio during week 30. The person was infected with an influenza A (H1N2) variant (H1N2v) virus and reported direct exposure to swine in a fair setting during the week preceding illness onset. This patient was younger than 18 years of age, was not hospitalized, and has fully recovered from their illness.

Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) Mortality Surveillance:
Based on National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) mortality surveillance data available on August 4, 2017, 5.7% of the deaths occurring during the week ending July 15, 2017 (week 28) were due to P&I. This percentage is below the epidemic threshold of 6.0% for week 28. CDC

China: Human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus

7 August - On 11, 14, and 21 July 2017, the National Health and Family Planning Commission of China (NHFPC) notified WHO of three individual laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus in China. ... The Chinese government has assessed that it is still likely that sporadic cases will occur in China taking into consideration the previous epidemic situation and risk assessment. To date, a total of 1557 laboratory-confirmed human infections with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus have been reported in China through IHR notification since early 2013. WHO

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

3 August:

Febrile respiratory illness cases:
- Military Recruits - 45 positive of 91 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 4 positive of 17 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 6 positive of 26 tested.
Vaccine Effectiveness: Moderate influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) was seen in NHRC surveillance during 2016-17. VE against A/H3 was 64% (95% CI, 43-78%). Similar VE was observed among children and adults. VE is estimated using surveillance data from DoD beneficiaries and civilians near the US-Mexico border. Naval Health Research Center

USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During 9 - 29 July 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 28 - 30), a total of 24 specimens were collected and received from 18 locations. Results were finalized for 19 specimens from 14 locations. During Week 29, one influenza A(H3N2) was identified. No influenza viruses were identified during Weeks 28 and 30. Approximately 9% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 29 and 0% during Weeks 28 and 30. The influenza percent positive for the season is currently 34%. U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

WHO: Influenza Update

7 August - In the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere and in some countries of South East Asia, high levels of influenza activity continued to be reported. In Central America and the Caribbean increased influenza activity was reported in a few countries. Influenza activity in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere was reported at low levels. Worldwide, influenza A(H3N2) viruses are predominating. WHO

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Cyclosporiasis in travellers returning to the United Kingdom from Mexico in Summer 2017: Lessons from the recent past to inform the future

8 August - During the summers of 2015 and 2016, the United Kingdom experienced large outbreaks of cyclosporiasis in travellers returning from Mexico. As the source of the outbreaks was not identified, there is the potential for a similar outbreak to occur in 2017; indeed 78 cases had already been reported as at 27 July 2017. Early communication and international collaboration is essential to provide a better understanding of the source and extent of this recurring situation. Eurosurveillance

Dutch police make arrests in contaminated eggs case

10 August - Dutch police arrested two suspects on Thursday as part of an investigation into the illegal use of a potentially harmful insecticide in the poultry industry, the Dutch
prosecution service said. Millions of chicken eggs have been pulled from European supermarket shelves as a result of the scare over the use of the insecticide fipronil, and hundreds of thousands of hens may be culled in the Netherlands. Prosecutors said in a statement they had conducted raids at eight locations in the Netherlands and Belgium, confiscating cars and seizing bank accounts and real estate. The arrested suspects were directors at Dutch company Chickfriend, which is at the center of the scandal. ... The company directors are suspected of threatening public health and possession of a prohibited pesticide, prosecutors said. 

 Reuters

Increase in reported cases of Cyclospora cayetanensis infection, United States, Summer 2017

7 August - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), State and Local Health Departments, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are investigating an increase in reported cases of cyclosporiasis. The purpose of this HAN Advisory is to notify public health departments and healthcare facilities and to provide guidance to healthcare providers of the increase in reported cases. ... Healthcare providers should consider a diagnosis of cyclosporiasis in patients with prolonged or remitting-relapsing diarrheal illness. Testing for Cyclospora is not routinely done in most U.S. laboratories, even when stool is tested for parasites. ... Cyclosporiasis is a nationally notifiable disease; healthcare providers should report suspect and confirmed cases of infection to public health authorities. 

CDC

Iowa warns about use of copper mugs with alcoholic beverages

8 August - The State of Iowa has issued an advisory bulletin warning consumers about selling and serving alcoholic beverages in copper mugs. ... The popularity of a drink called Moscow Mule, an alcoholic cocktail that is typically served in a copper mug, has led to inquiries about the safe use of these mugs. ... [T]he Federal Food and Drug Administration’s Model Food Code ... prohibits copper from coming into direct contact with foods that have a pH below 6.0. ... Since the pH of a Moscow Mule is well below 6.0, the copper mugs with a copper interior may not be used with this particular drink. Copper mugs that are lined with another metal such as nickel or stainless steel are allowed. 

Food Poisoning Bulletin

Some tuna can carry up to 36 times the toxic chemicals of others. Here’s why

9 August - ... In a first-of-its-kind global study, scientists from Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego analyzed 117 yellowfin tuna taken from 12 locations worldwide, measuring the contaminant levels of each. They found yellowfin tuna caught closer to more industrialized locations off North America and Europe can carry 36 times more pollutants — including pesticides, flame retardants and
polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) — than the same species caught in more remote locations, like in the West Pacific Ocean. ... Most of the tuna analyzed would be considered safe under current EPA/FDA joint consumption advice, but there were concerns. The study found that 90 percent of tuna caught in the northeast Atlantic Ocean — and more than 60 percent of yellowfin samples caught in the Gulf of Mexico — contained pollutant levels that would have triggered health advisories in some segments of the population, including pregnant and nursing women. NPR

WELLNESS

For cosmetics, let the buyer beware

7 August - ... Thanks to a lack of federal regulations, the watchword for consumers of cosmetics and personal care products should be caveat emptor: Let the buyer beware. ... Dr. Robert M. Califf, who served as F.D.A. chief under President Obama, noted, “The cosmetic industry remains largely self-regulated. History has repeatedly shown that when there is insufficient regulatory oversight, a few unscrupulous people or companies will exploit the vulnerable public for profit.” Even when a hazard comes to light, a product can remain on the market for years until negotiations make their way through the legal system or the company decides to halt sales. ... Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, and Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine, have proposed a bill, the Personal Care Products Safety Act, that would require manufacturers of cosmetics and personal care products to submit a list of all ingredients and reports of adverse events to the F.D.A. and give the agency authority to order product recalls. The New York Times

Marijuana use holds three-fold blood pressure death risk: study

9 August - People who smoke marijuana have a three times greater risk of dying from hypertension, or high blood pressure, than those who have never used the drug, scientists said on Wednesday. The risk grows with every year of use, they said. ... The study, published in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology, was a retrospective follow-up study of 1,213 people aged 20 or above who had been involved in a large and ongoing National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. In 2005–2006, they were asked if they had ever used marijuana. ... The average duration of use among users of marijuana, or cannabis, was 11.5 years. The results showed marijuana users had a 3.42-times higher risk of death from hypertension than non-users, and a 1.04 greater risk for each year of use. Reuters
Stroke risk declining in men but not women

9 August - The incidence of stroke has declined in recent years, but only in men. Researchers studied stroke incidence in four periods from 1993 to 2010 in five counties in Ohio and Kentucky. There were 7,710 strokes altogether, 57.2 percent of them in women. After adjusting for age and race, they found that stroke incidence in men had decreased to 192 per hundred thousand men in 2010, down from 263 in 1993–94. But for women the incidence was 198 per hundred thousand in 2010, down from 217 in 1993–94, a statistically insignificant change. ... Most of the difference was in ischemic stroke, the most common cause, resulting from a blocked blood vessel supplying blood to the brain.

Suicides in teen girls hit 40-year high

3 August - The suicide rate among teenage girls continues to rise and hit a 40-year high in 2015, according to a new analysis released Thursday. Suicide rates doubled among girls and rose by more than 30 percent among teen boys and young men between 2007 and 2015, the updated breakdown from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds. It’s all part of a growing national trend for more suicides, said CDC suicide expert Thomas Simon. ... “Nationally overall we have been seeing an increase in suicide rates that is pretty pervasive among all age groups,” added Simon. Overall suicide rates have gone up 28 percent since 2000, he said.

USAFRICOM

Central African Republic: UN warns of genocide in Central African Republic

8 August - The UN’s aid chief has alerted member states of the "early warning signs of genocide" amid increasing violence. The African nation has seen the worst sectarian violence since the overthrow of the government in 2013. The Central African Republic risks plunging deeper into a humanitarian crisis if the international community fails to respond to growing violence, said UN aid chief Stephen O’Brien on Monday. "Violence is intensifying, risking a repeat of the devastating destructive crisis that gripped the country four years ago," O’Brien told a special UN briefing. "The early warning signs of genocide are there. We must act now.”

Democratic Republic of Congo: 250 killed in 'ethnic' massacres, says UN

5 August - Three months of massacres that have left 62 children dead could escalate into wider ethnic cleansing in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the UN has warned. A total of
250 people have died in targeted killings with government forces and militias made up of children among those being blamed as complicit by international investigators. The accounts of almost 100 survivors who managed to escape from the Kasai province into neighbouring Angola form the basis of a report published by the UN Human Rights Office. Interviews with 96 refugees, many bearing horrific injuries and scars, show how local security forces “actively fomented, fuelled, and occasionally led, attacks on the basis of ethnicity”, according to the report. The Guardian

Ivory Coast reports growing dengue outbreak

7 August - The World Health Organization (WHO) reported late last week that Ivory Coast's capital city, Abidjan, is experiencing a dengue outbreak. As of Jul 11, there have been 623 suspected cases, including 2 deaths. The first dengue cases were reported in April, but the WHO said that the trend of suspected cases is growing. Between Jun 27 and Jul 4, there were 37 new cases; between Jul 4 and 11, 142 new suspected cases were reported. Of lab-confirmed cases, about two-thirds are dengue serotype 2 and about one-third are dengue serotype 3. Coinfection with yellow fever has been suspected in 68 cases and confirmed in 1 case. The majority (54%) of patients are female, and 27% are between the ages of 15 and 29 years. Fifty-five percent are over the age of 30. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

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USCENTCOM

Middle East: Chronic diseases spike in Middle East as conflicts rage

4 August - ... Across the Middle East, deaths resulting from violence grew by 850% between 1990 and 2015, according to a series of reports published on 3 August in the International Journal of Public Health. The increase accelerated after 2010, corresponding with the beginning of the Arab Spring movement and wars in Syria and Iraq. At the same time, the authors found, the incidence of many chronic diseases has also risen dramatically; the death rate from diabetes, for instance, grew 216% over the study period. Taken together, the analyses describe a disturbing deterioration in health across a broadly defined Middle Eastern region, which includes 22 countries — including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia and the United Arab Emirates — that are home to more than 580 million people. Nature

Middle East: Soaring suicide and murder rates compound Middle East suffering

7 August - Violent acts including suicide, homicide and sexual assaults are increasing faster in the eastern Mediterranean region than in any other in the world, adding to the suffering
of populations experiencing conflict and war. According to a huge body of work from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington in Seattle, deaths due to self-harm increased by 100% to 30,000 in the past 25 years in the region, and those from interpersonal violence were up 152% to 35,000. In other parts of the world during the same period, the number of deaths from suicide increased 19% and interpersonal violence by 12%. ... The research also showed that people in the region are suffering from two types of malnutrition – insufficient food and also the wrong sort of nourishment. The Guardian

**Saudi Arabia: MERS infects 7 more in Saudi Arabia, some part of hospital cluster**

8 August - The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health (MOH) reported seven new cases of MERS-CoV today, including five connected to a cluster in Dumah Al Jandal, most apparently linked to a hospital setting. Three of the new cases are healthcare workers, all expats who have asymptomatic infections and are in stable condition. They include a 49-year-old man and two women, ages 27 and 26. The other two new cases connected to the Dumah Al Jandal cluster are Saudi men. A 21-year-old is in critical condition after being diagnosed with Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV). The MOH said he was a household contact of another MERS-CoV patient. A 70-year-old is also in critical condition, and the MOH said he acquired his infection as a patient in the hospital. ... The new cases raise Saudi Arabia’s overall MERS-CoV total to 1,693 cases, 686 of them fatal. Thirteen people are still being treated for their infections. CIDRAP

**Yemen: Yemen blood bank may be forced to shut due to lack of funds**

8 August - Yemen’s national blood bank may be forced to close due to a lack of money after an international medical charity decided to end two years of support, the director of the blood bank said. But the U.N. World Health Organization (WHO) said it was trying to help by sending further supplies. Patients suffering diseases including thalassaemia, cancer and kidney failures, as well as victims of a two-year civil war in which more than 10,000 people have been killed, would be affected if the bank closed, officials said. Reuters

**USEUCOM**

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**Kosovo: Kosovo's Roma are still struggling with lead-poisoning suffered in UN camps**

6 August - ... Around 600 of [the] inhabitants [of the Roma neighbourhood of Mahalla in Kosovo’s northern city of Mitrovica] were given shelter by the UN mission in Kosovo
UNMIK) in five camps, initially meant as a temporary measure for 45 days, but they ended up staying six years. Living near a heavy metals mining complex, these displaced people were unaware that they were breathing in air and trampling on soil contaminated with lead and other toxins, as scientific tests have showed. ... In February 2006, a panel of experts appointed by the UN ... concluded that UNMIK had failed "to comply with applicable human rights standards in response to the adverse health condition caused by lead contamination in the IDP camps and the consequent harms suffered by the complainants". ... UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in May this year expressed the organisation's "profound regret for the suffering endured by all individuals" living in the camps. As an "exceptional measure," he decided to set up a trust fund to implement assistance projects for the Roma community. But Kujtim Pacaku, a former Roma MP in Kosovo’s parliament, said it was "immoral to make up for the mass abuse only with money." PRI

United Kingdom: Acid attacks on the rise in the U.K.

6 August - ... Corrosive substances are increasingly used as weapons in the U.K., especially in London, which had more than 450 attacks in 2016. London's Metropolitan Police have recorded more than 100 attacks in the first four months of this year, many in East London. The most recent attack happened just last week. "We are now at levels that one of my colleagues described as epidemic," said Dr. Martin Niall, a burn surgeon at Mid-Essex Hospital, where many acid attack victims in East London are treated. "Everyone, ourselves included, has been shocked by this emerging threat to public health." ... He says assailants use acid today for many of the same reasons as they did in Victorian times: "It's easy to purchase, there's no way of tracing payments if you pay by cash, and they know the likelihood of being charged for carrying acid is very remote." Shah says two-thirds of the victims in Britain are men while, globally, most are women. ... But most of the attacks in the U.K. are random and are often connected to robberies or gang violence. Many of the perpetrators are in their teens. NPR

USNORTHCOM

U.S.: CDC to invest millions in enhanced antibiotic resistance testing

4 August - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today announced a $77 million investment in efforts to track and fight antibiotic resistance. The money will be distributed to public health departments in all 50 states and Puerto Rico to help them combat antibiotic resistant bacteria in food, healthcare facilities, and communities, with a particular focus on enhancing testing capabilities in the agency’s regional antibiotic resistance labs. It will also help fund a new surveillance center for tuberculosis (TB). CIDRAP
U.S.: Death rates from colon cancer are increasing for white Americans under 55

8 August - Earlier this year, researcher Rebecca Siegel of the American Cancer Society published a startling report showing that colon and rectal cancer incidence is rising among Gen X and millennials while falling in older generations. On Tuesday ... she and her co-authors identified “a true and perplexing escalation in disease occurrence.” In a paper in *JAMA*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, they report that deaths from colorectal cancer are increasing for young and middle-aged Americans — though the increase appears, at least so far, to be confined to white men and women. ... The mortality rate for whites had been declining for decades, but it began to climb starting in 2004, going from 3.6 per 100,000 to 4.1 per 100,000 in 2014. For blacks, it went down to 6.1 per 100,000 in 2014. While that’s still higher than for whites, the trend is heading in the right direction. The Washington Post

U.S.: It wasn’t even a hurricane, but heavy rains flooded New Orleans as pumps faltered

9 August - ... Panic and rough memories have surfaced across New Orleans this week as residents cope with yet another reminder that parts of the city sit as much as seven feet below sea level. And even though U.S. taxpayers have spent nearly $15 billion rebuilding the city’s flood protections since 2005, few here are confident the fixes can keep the city dry for long. Unlike during Hurricane Katrina, the problem over the weekend wasn’t the 133 miles of levees and flood walls that protect New Orleans from the tidal surges of the Gulf of Mexico or Lake Pontchartrain, which hangs over the northern and eastern edge of the city. Instead, parts of New Orleans were underwater because the city’s hundreds of miles of drains and pumps couldn’t bail rainwater fast enough. The Washington Post

U.S.: Rat lungworm confirmed in Oahu, state total now 16

10 August - Just a week after Gov. David Y. Ige, together with the Hawaii DOH and the Hawai’i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) announced the state’s plans to place a stronger emphasis on the prevention of rat lungworm disease, a sixteenth case has been reported—this one the first from Oahu. The adult Oahu resident is currently hospitalized. ... The source of the individual’s infection is still unknown at this time, but DOH will continue investigations based on additional information gathered. ... The other rat lungworm cases reported this year were from Hawaii Island (9), Maui residents (4) and two (2) Maui visitors. Outbreak News Today
U.S.: San Diego hepatitis A update - More than 300 cases and 10 deaths

10 August - In a follow-up on the hepatitis A outbreak in San Diego County, CA, the number of cases reported this year has climbed to 312, including 10 fatalities, according to latest health department data. Of the cases, nearly seven out of 10 patients required hospitalization for their illness (215). The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency says the investigation into the outbreak is ongoing. It has been challenging because of the long incubation period of the disease (15 to 50 days) and the difficulty experienced to contact many individuals sickened with the illness who are homeless and/or illicit drug users. Outbreak News Today

U.S.: South Texas fights tuberculosis one blood test at a time

4 August - ... Tuberculosis is an airborne bacterial infection that attacks the lungs and can be deadly. ... A vial of blood can be tested to see if people are carrying TB without showing symptoms. That’s called latent tuberculosis infection, a condition that puts them at much greater risk of developing active, contagious TB if they are exposed again. “It goes into your lungs and usually it hides there dormant for years and years. Although it sounds very scary, it is completely treatable,” says Dr. Barbara Taylor, an infectious disease specialist who is part of a program called Breathe Easy South Texas. BEST is an ambitious $2 million effort to test at-risk people in 20 Texas counties. ... The Texas Department of State Health Services is teaming up with the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, UT Health San Antonio and University Health System. They offer testing at places like shelters, diabetes clinics, and medical offices that treat mostly low-income patients. NPR

U.S.: Speedy Detroit blight removal could be endangering residents

6 August - Speed before safety. Contractors in Detroit were under so much pressure to knock down thousands of abandoned properties that they cut corners, mishandled deadly asbestos at dozens of sites, and, in two cases, appeared to falsify inspection reports, according to documents the Free Press obtained under the state Freedom of Information Act. One employee of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality blamed city officials, saying that at a meeting they acknowledged putting “production over compliance” with asbestos regulations. City officials told the Free Press they disputed the DEQ employee’s account of the meeting but they admitted mistakes and said Friday they were cooperating with a previously undisclosed criminal investigation of the inspection reports. Detroit Free Press

U.S.: Texas’s maternal death rate investigated after lawmaker's complicated delivery

9 August - ... Recent reports show that African-American women in Texas have
disproportionately high rates of maternal death, which has, in turn, given Texas the highest maternal mortality rate not only in the U.S. but in the developed world. By 2014, the state’s maternal death rate reached 35.8 per 100,000 live births, according to a study in Obstetrics and Gynecology. That’s significantly higher than any other country in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development group of wealthy nations with the exception of Mexico, the study reports. ... The state’s Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force was formed in 2013. So far it has produced two reports digging into data of how and why women are dying in childbirth in the state. [Rep. Shawn] Thierry’s bill would specifically direct the task force to gather more information on the deaths of black women. According to a 2016 report from the task force, though only 11 percent of all births in the state were to black women, they accounted for 29 percent of all maternal deaths. Fox News

U.S.: Trump to declare national emergency over opioids two days after top aide rejected notion

10 August - President Trump on Thursday said his administration would declare the opioid crisis a national emergency, just two days after his top health official said, after meeting with the president, that such a step was not necessary. Trump’s remarks came after his commission on combating drug abuse issued an “urgent” recommendation last week that he issue an emergency declaration. It’s still unclear what the emergency declaration will look like. The laws that govern such declarations stipulate that the president himself spell out what resources will become available and what new authorities the administration will take on. “We’re going to draw it up and we’re going to make it a national emergency,” Trump told reporters in New Jersey. “It is a serious problem the likes of which we have never had.” STAT

U.S.: U.S. officials no longer pushing to test truck drivers, train engineers for sleep apnea, despite role in deadly crashes

8 August - U.S. officials are abandoning plans to require sleep apnea screening for truck drivers and train engineers, a decision that safety experts say puts millions of lives at risk. The Federal Railroad Administration and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration said late last week that they are no longer pursuing the regulation that would require testing for the fatigue-inducing disorder that’s been blamed for deadly rail crashes in New York City and New Jersey and several highway crashes. The agencies argue that it should be up to railroads and trucking companies to decide whether to test employees. One railroad that does test, Metro-North in the New York City suburbs, found that 11.6 percent of its engineers have sleep apnea. STAT

U.S.: Your ZIP code might be as important to health as your genetic code

4 August - When a receptionist hands out a form to fill out at a doctor’s office, the
questions are usually about medical issues: What's the visit for? Are you allergic to anything? Up to date on vaccines? But some health organizations are now asking much more general questions: Do you have trouble paying your bills? Do you feel safe at home? Do you have enough to eat? Research shows these factors can be as important to health as exercise habits or whether you get enough sleep. Some doctors even think someone's ZIP code is as important to their health as their genetic code. That's why Shannon McGrath was asked to fill in a "life situation form" this spring when she turned up for her first obstetrics appointment at Kaiser Permanente in Portland, Ore. She was 36 weeks pregnant. "When I got pregnant, I was homeless," she says. "I didn't have a lot of structure. And so it was hard to make an appointment. I had struggles with child care for my other kids, transportation, financial struggles." The form asked about her rent, her debts, her child care situation and other social factors. On the strength of her answers, Kaiser Permanente assigned her what is called a "patient navigator." NPR

USPACOM

Asia: Air travel responsible for spread of dengue through Asia

4 August - While the incidences of many other infectious diseases have declined over the past decade, the number of cases and outbreaks of dengue virus have continued to increase. The spread of dengue to new areas is likely due in large part to trends in air travel, researchers now report. ... In the new work [researchers] analyzed the spread of dengue viruses in Asia from 1956 to 2015. They used 2,202 genetic sequences of dengue viruses, collected in 20 countries or regions of Asia over the 59 years, to determine how different strains were related. They also investigated trends in air travel, maritime mobility, migration, and socio-economics to determine what factors impact the spread of dengue. The spread of three different dengue virus serotypes, DENV-1, -2, and -3, is associated with air traffic more so than any other factors, the data revealed. Air traffic hubs such as Thailand and India, the researchers found, help seed dengue epidemics, while China, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Singapore help diffuse the virus to other Asian countries. Infection Control

Australia: Auckland mumps outbreak: More than 200 cases reported

9 August - Officials with the Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) now put the total confirmed and probable mumps cases at 213 as of Tuesday. ARPHS medical officer of health Dr Josephine Herman said mumps was now widespread across Auckland. Low vaccination rates are fueling Auckland’s mumps outbreak. ARPHS is concerned not enough young Aucklanders are immunized in the face of an unrelenting mumps outbreak. “The
majority of cases are aged 10 to 29 years as this age group has had lower than average immunization rates," says Clinical Director, Dr Julia Peters. Around 80 percent of the current cases were not fully vaccinated. Outbreak News Today

Australia: Australian teenager in hospital after sea bug attack

7 August - An Australian teenager is recovering in hospital after being bitten by multiple "mite-sized sea critters". Sam Kanizay, 16, found his feet and ankles covered in blood after soaking his legs in Melbourne's Brighton Beach on Saturday evening. Jarrod Kanizay said his son arrived home with what "looked like a war injury" and that his legs would not stop bleeding. The family are seeking expert opinion to identify the flesh-eating bugs. ... Marine biologist Dr Genefor Walker-Smith, who saw some of the samples, told Australia's Herald Sun newspaper that the bugs were probably lysianassid amphipods, or sea fleas. "It's possible he disturbed a feeding group but they are generally not out there waiting to attack like piranhas," she said. BBC News

Bangladesh: Study finds high rates of drug resistance to urinary tract infections in Bangladesh

3 August - ... In a recent study in Bangladesh, scientists warn that urinary tract pathogens are developing resistance to antibiotics and they highly recommend sensitivity tests before prescribing any antibiotic. The study ... suggests understanding the local vulnerability pattern of the pathogens. ... The study found that there is great risk of drug resistance if antibiotics are prescribed without sensitivity or laboratory culture tests. The principal investigator of the research, Dr Md Atiqul Islam ... says, "Ideally urine culture sensitivity patterns should be done before prescribing any antibiotic in treating urinary tract infection (UTI)." News-Medical.net

India: Alcohol ban hits TB testing in eastern India

7 August - Doctors in eastern India can no longer test patients for the deadly lung disease tuberculosis (TB) after authorities imposed a ban on the sale of alcohol, impacting the supply of spirits for medical use, health officials said on Monday. Nitish Kumar, chief minister of Bihar state, instituted prohibition in April last year after his party won local polls backed by large numbers of women voters who demanded he ban alcohol, blaming its consumption for rising domestic violence. But health officials in Bihar say the ban has also meant that other types of alcohol and spirits - essential for conducting tests and disinfecting equipment - are no longer available in the state. "So far, we were using the old stock of alcohol and spirits to conduct tests but now, they too have run short completely. We are unable to conduct any TB test until we get the fresh stock," said Bihar's Communicable Diseases Officer Ganesh Prasad. Thomson Reuters Foundation News
Nepal: The omnipresence of dust in Kathmandu

7 August - ... Because there is not enough electricity to meet the demands of Nepal’s rapidly growing cities, blackouts have been rampant. Each time the electricity powers off, thousands of diesel generators rumble to life, spewing noxious particulate matter, or PM2.5. The particles are less than 2.5 microns in diameter and sit suspended in the air, waiting to be inhaled. Though Nepal has almost no industry, it faces some of the worst air pollution in the world. Pacific Standard

Brazil: Yellow fever outbreak that threatened Brazil’s megacities ends

4 August - An alarming outbreak of yellow fever that threatened Brazil early this year appears to be over, according to data released this week by the Pan American Health Organization. There were no new cases reported in Brazil in the last month, said officials of the agency, a regional branch of the World Health Organization. Of the neighboring countries to which the outbreak had spread, only Bolivia reported a case. ... The government distributed 20 million doses of yellow fever vaccine, including more than 3 million from the W.H.O. emergency stockpile. In retrospect, reports show that total cases peaked in January, midsummer in the Southern Hemisphere, then fell substantially by March and nearly disappeared by June. The New York Times

The Americas: Americas countries report more chikungunya cases

7 August - Countries in the Americas reported 697 more suspected, confirmed, and imported chikungunya cases last week, most of them from Panama, which added 4 weeks’ worth of cases, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said in its latest regular update. The weekly total of new cases is down steeply from the 51,000 reported in the region the previous week. That report reflected a major update from Brazil, which continues to be the hardest hit country in the Americas. ... The region has now reported 141,266 cases in 2017. The number of deaths held steady at 51. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)
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