

11 December 2015

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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The November issue includes featured articles on vaping, a smart phone app for Environmental Noise Monitoring, sea traffic, dangerous jobs, and professional pathways.



U.S. MILITARY

Alcohol dependency risks vary for veterans

4 December - Only certain veterans with alcohol dependency have high comorbidity, researchers said here. They identified three subtypes that were unique to veterans with alcohol dependency, and each subtype was a significant predictor of quality of life, physical health, mental health, conscientiousness, hostility, and cognitive function. ... The new diagnostic manual, the DSM-5, separates alcohol use disorder into severe, moderate, and mild categories. The further subtypes "are more of a thing that researchers have started to look into, in hopes that clinicians can say, 'Oh, you have type A alcohol disorder, and you will respond better to this treatment, versus someone who has type B,'" said Brian Fuehrlein, MD, PhD, also at Yale University but unaffiliated with the study. [MedPage Today](#)

Army says it will review cases of dismissed soldiers with mental health problems

4 December - The acting secretary of the Army, Eric Fanning, promises to conduct a "thorough, multidisciplinary review" to determine whether thousands of combat soldiers with mental health problems or traumatic brain injuries have been unfairly kicked out of the Army for misconduct. His promise — in a letter to members of the U.S. Senate dated Nov. 30 but released Thursday — comes after NPR and Colorado Public Radio reported that commanders have dismissed more than 22,000 troubled combat troops since 2009 instead of helping them. [NPR](#)

Completeness and timeliness of reporting of notifiable medical conditions

November 2015 - The complete and timely reporting of notifiable medical conditions occurring among U.S. military service members is important for the control of communicable and preventable diseases and injuries. The Defense Medical Surveillance System (DMSS) was used to identify all hospital and ambulatory care encounters among service members occurring during 2008–2014. Incident encounters with diagnoses of Department of Defense notifiable medical conditions were matched to reportable medical events entered through the Disease Reporting System Internet. Over this time period, the Services reported 47.6% of notifiable hospitalized cases and 57.2% of notifiable ambulatory care cases. Timeliness of reporting improved over the time period with 40.0% of notifiable hospitalized cases reported within 1 week in 2008 and 73.6% in 2014. For ambulatory care cases, 62.3% were reported within 1 week in 2008 and 81.3% in 2014. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Classified Version of the Weekly Update

An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the **SECRET** level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site:

<http://phc.army.smil.mil>

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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

Congresswoman presses for information on drug abuse in military

8 December - A congresswoman is asking the Pentagon for information on how it addresses drug abuse in the ranks, saying the military should be a model for how the country deals with the issue. ... Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-Ind.) wrote in a letter to Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, ... "While drug abuse is significantly lower in the military, many of our service members and their dependents still struggle with addiction to prescription opioid pain medications." ... Eleven percent of service members reported misusing prescription drugs, according to a March 2013 report from the National Institute on Drug Abuse cited by Walorski. That's an increase of 2 percent from 2002 and 4 percent from 2005. ... "Beyond the immediate health concerns of our service members and their families, drug addiction and abuse also presents a significant readiness challenge for the total force." Walorski specifically wants to know what safeguards the military has in place to prevent over-prescription of opioids and what training the military has on appropriate prescribing of painkillers. [The Hill](#)

Defying stereotypes, number of incarcerated veterans in U.S. drops

8 December - The number of military veterans in the country's jails and prisons continues to drop, a new report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows. It's the first government report that includes significant numbers of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — and the findings defy stereotypes that returning war veterans are prone to crime. The data show that veterans are less likely to be behind bars than nonveterans. The study tracked an estimated 181,500 incarcerated veterans in 2011-2012, 99 percent of whom were male. During that period, veterans made up 8 percent of inmates in local jails and in state and federal prisons, excluding military facilities. [NPR](#)

Horoho relinquishes command of MEDCOM



3 December - Lt. Gen. Patricia D. Horoho passed the flag to Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, Army vice chief of staff, during a ceremony at Fort Sam Houston today marking the end of her tenure as the Army's 43rd surgeon general. Horoho assumed command of the U.S. Army Medical Command, or MEDCOM, Dec 5, 2011, and was sworn in as the surgeon general, Dec. 7, 2011. She was the first female and first nurse to command the Army's largest medical organization. [Army.mil](#)

Penis transplants being planned to help wounded troops

6 December - Within a year, maybe in just a few months, a young soldier with a horrific injury from a bomb blast in Afghanistan will have an operation that has never been performed in the United States: a penis transplant. The organ will come from a deceased

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donor, and the surgeons, from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, say they expect it to start working in a matter of months, developing urinary function, sensation and, eventually, the ability to have sex. From 2001 to 2013, 1,367 men in military service suffered wounds to the genitals in Iraq or Afghanistan, according to the Department of Defense Trauma Registry. Nearly all were under 35. [The New York Times](#)

Senators demand transparency in US military justice system

8 December - Responding to an Associated Press investigation, three U.S. senators on Tuesday urged Defense Secretary Ashton Carter to lift what they called the military justice system's "cloak of secrecy" and make records from sex crimes cases readily accessible. ... AP's investigation, published last month, found more inmates are in military prisons for sex crimes against children than for any other offense. But the military's opaque justice system prevents the public from knowing the full scope of their crimes or how much time they actually spend behind bars. [The New York Times](#)

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GLOBAL

Cesarean delivery rates: Finding the sweet spot

8 December - Among 194 countries, maternal and neonatal mortality was lowest when cesarean delivery rates were about 19%. Investigators examined the relation between cesarean delivery rates and maternal and neonatal mortality in 2012 among the 194 WHO member countries. Cesarean delivery rates ranged from 0.6% in South Sudan to 55.6% in Brazil. In countries with rates $\leq 7.2\%$, mean maternal mortality was 463.3 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, and mean neonatal mortality was 30.2 neonatal deaths per 1000 live births. In countries with rates from $>7.2\%$ to 19.1%, maternal mortality was 137.0 deaths per 100,000 live births, and neonatal mortality was 17.3 deaths per 1000 live births. In countries with rates from $>19.1\%$ to 27.3%, maternal mortality was 35.9 deaths per 100,000 live births, and neonatal mortality was 6.7 deaths per 1000 live births. In countries with rates $>27.3\%$, maternal mortality was 36.7 deaths per 100,000 live births, and neonatal mortality was 6.3 per 1000 live births. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Death and disability from injuries down worldwide

4 December - The worldwide rate of death and disability caused by injuries has fallen by nearly one-third since 1990, a new study says. ... The researchers looked at data from 188 countries in 21 regions of the world. They included information on 26 causes of injuries and almost 50 specific types of injuries. In 2013, 973 million people suffered injuries that required medical attention or treatment, the study found. Nearly 5 million people died of

their injuries. In most parts of the world, men had higher injury rates than women until age 80, the researchers reported. Major causes of injuries were car crashes (29 percent), suicide and other forms of self-harm (18 percent), falls (12 percent), and violence (8.5 percent), the researchers found. ... There was a significant decline in death and disability rates for 22 of the 26 causes of injury reviewed. Researchers calculated that the rates fell by 31 percent from 1990 to 2013. [MedlinePlus](#)

Disease sleuths analyze Google searches to stop infections

10 December - With sexually transmitted diseases on the rise, researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago think they might have a powerful new weapon to fight their spread: Google searches. The company behind the Web's leading search engine has quietly begun giving researchers access to its data troves to develop analytical models for tracking infectious diseases in real time or close to it. UIC is one of at least four academic institutions that have received access so far, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Google said. Researchers can mine Google data to identify search terms that spiked during previous upticks in a particular disease. Then, researchers can measure the frequency of those searches in real time to estimate the number of emerging cases. For instance, a jump in gonorrhea might coincide with more people searching "painful urination" or other symptoms. "If this works, it could revolutionize STD surveillance," said Supriya Mehta, an associate professor of epidemiology at the UIC School of Public Health. [NPR](#)

Malaria deaths drop below half a million, Africa makes progress: WHO

8 December - The number of people killed by malaria dropped below half a million in the past year, reflecting vast progress against the mosquito-borne disease in some of the previously hardest-hit areas of sub-Saharan Africa. The World Health Organization's annual malaria report showed deaths falling to 438,000 in 2015 - down dramatically from 839,000 in 2000 - and found a significant increase in the number of countries moving toward the elimination of malaria. ... And while Africa continues to bear the highest malaria burden of all regions of the world, death rates from the disease have fallen since 2000 by 66 percent across all age groups, and by 71 percent among children under five. ... "In sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of the population is now sleeping under insecticide-treated mosquito nets, compared to just 2 percent in 2000," [Margaret Chan, the WHO's director general] wrote in the report published on Tuesday. [Reuters](#)

Sanofi wins first dengue vaccine market approval in Mexico

9 December - Sanofi's dengue vaccine is to make its market debut in Mexico, the French drugmaker said on Wednesday, adding that it expects to have filed for market approval in some 20 countries by year-end. Sanofi Pasteur, the group's vaccines division, said Mexico

had approved the preventive treatment, called Dengvaxia, for all four dengue virus serotypes, but only for patients aged 9 to 45 who live in areas where the disease is endemic. ... Guillaume Leroy, who leads the dengue team at Sanofi Pasteur, said the vaccine acted best as an immune booster for patients with some previous exposure. He told Reuters in an interview that additional data over the coming years would be needed to assess whether the vaccine may be of use to travelers. [Reuters](#)

Scientists create infertile mosquitoes

7 December - UK scientists say they have reached a milestone in the fight against malaria by creating a genetically modified mosquito that is infertile. The plan is to wipe out the insects that spread malaria to people via bites, Nature Biotechnology reports. Two copies of the mutant gene render the malaria-carrying female insect completely barren. But one copy is enough for a mosquito mum or dad to pass it on to offspring. This should perpetually spread the infertility gene throughout the population so the species dwindles or dies out. However, the Imperial College London team say more safety tests are needed, meaning it will be a decade before the mutant mosquitoes can be released into the wild. [BBC News](#)

Texting triggers new type of brain wave

7 December - Video EEG monitoring reveals 'texting rhythm' in some epilepsy patients. It's not often that researchers detect a new waveform on electroencephalography (EEG), a technology that's been around for about a century. But that's exactly what happened to EEG technicians at two academic medical centers who highlighted what they saw as test abnormalities. When they went to the video replay, they saw that these strange waveforms occurred when patients were texting, and only then. ... Tatum and colleagues evaluated data from 129 patients seen at Mayo Clinic Florida and Rush University Medical Center, finding that nearly a quarter of the population (24%) showed this "texting rhythm" on video EEG monitoring. [MedPage Today](#)

The U.S. is a world leader in gun deaths

8 December - Imagine picking up the U.S. and dropping it into a different part of the world. How would its record of gun deaths compare to its neighbors? In the wake of the mass shootings of the past few weeks, I decided to look into that question. I used a handy tool from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. It turns out, the U.S. doesn't fare too well. In five out of six regions, it would be right near the top in terms of gun deaths per 100,000 people. Only in one region is it near the bottom. [NPR](#)

Treating whole communities for scabies feasible, effective

9 December - Endemic scabies can be fought successfully by dosing entire communities with ivermectin (Stromectol), results from a randomized trial in the Fiji island chain indicated. Prevalence of scabies fell from 32.1% to 1.9% after a year of community-wide treatment with ivermectin in the cluster-randomized trial -- a relative decline of 94% (95% CI 83%-100%) -- compared with a decrease in prevalence from 36.6% to 18.8% (relative

decline 49%, 95% CI 37%-60%) in a community assigned to treatment only of diagnosed cases. [MedPage Today](#)

WHO: Globally, more than 1 million new STIs occur each day

9 December - Each day almost 1 million teens and adults through age 49 contract one of four common sexually transmitted infections (STIs), according to estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) published yesterday in *PLoS One*, and the number tops 1 million when more STIs are included. WHO experts based their estimates on prevalence data published in the literature from 2005 through 2012. They found that among girls and women 15 to 49 years old in 2012, the estimated prevalence of chlamydia was 4.2%, gonorrhea 0.8%, trichomoniasis 5.0%, and syphilis 0.5%. Among men, the percentages were 2.7%, 0.6%, 0.6%, and 0.48%, respectively.

[CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

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INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 47:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity increased to low or moderate in some states, but remained minimal in most states.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal across EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal throughout PACOM.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Both show minimal influenza activity.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal.

[DHA -Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch](#)

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 28 November 2015 (Week 47)

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) continues to be the most reported positive laboratory respiratory specimen among MTFs.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 47 were 33% lower than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: No hospitalized influenza cases were reported to APHC(P) through DRSi in week 47 but 2 have been reported in week 46. Four hospitalized cases have been reported to date this season.
- Viral specimens: During week 47, 107 of 651 (16%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-C reported the most influenza A–positive specimens (3),

followed by RHC-A (1) and RHC-P (1). No other regions reported any influenza positive specimens. [APHC](#)

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

During week 47 (November 22-28, 2015), influenza activity increased slightly in the United States but remained low overall.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 47 was influenza A viruses, with influenza A (H3) viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories was low.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below their system-specific epidemic threshold in both the NCHS Mortality Surveillance System and the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System. [CDC](#)

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 48/2015 (23 November–29 November)

- Influenza activity across the WHO European Region was at low levels in most of the 40 countries that reported data for week 48/2015.
- Representatives of all seasonal influenza viruses (A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2), B/Victoria- and Yamagata-lineage) were detected sporadically from both sentinel and non-sentinel sources .

Season

- As usual for this time of year, influenza activity in the European Region remains low, with few influenza viruses detected.
- Although low numbers of viruses have been subtyped (type A) or ascribed to lineage (type B), A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses have been detected more often than A(H3N2) and B/Victoria lineage, more often than B/Yamagata in both sentinel and non-sentinel specimens than in the same period during the 2014–2015 season.

[European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO](#)

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For 2015 Week 48 (through 5 December 2015):

- **Influenza:** No new cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza among US military basic trainees.
- **FRI surveillance** at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated elevated FRI rates at Lackland AFB. [Naval Health Research Center](#)

Phase 1 trial shows good safety, immune response for H7N9 flu vaccine

8 December - A live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) candidate for H7N9 avian flu produced a good immune response and was shown safe in a phase 1 human trial, researchers from Russia and the World Health Organization (WHO) reported yesterday in

The Lancet Infectious Diseases. The investigators gave two doses of the vaccine to 29 healthy adults aged 18 to 49 years and placebo doses to 10 volunteers of the same age. The vaccine was made from an H7N9 strain in China, where almost all of the world's human cases of H7N9 flu have been confirmed, and was administered in October 2014. Seroconversion as measured by microneutralization assay was noted in 14 LAIV recipients (48%) after one dose and in 21 (72%) after two doses. Cellular immune responses were induced in 27 of 29 recipients (93%). The vaccine was well tolerated. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

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

During Surveillance Weeks 47 & 48, 22 November - 5 December 2015, 142 specimens were collected and received from 39 locations. Results were finalized for 95 specimens from 32 locations. Two influenza B viruses and one influenza A(H1N1) were identified in Week 48. [US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Groups unveil plan to rid rabies, target dog vaccination

10 December - Global animal and human health groups today unveiled a framework for eliminating rabies in humans by 2030, calling for donor support for the efforts and more visibility for a disease that kills tens of thousands each year, a large portion of them children. ... Three key actions contained in the framework are making human vaccines and antibody treatments more affordable, ensuring that those who are bitten get prompt treatment, and implementing mass dog vaccinations to tamp down the disease at its source, according to a press release today from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

[CIDRAP](#)

Newly identified mcr-1 resistance gene found in Denmark

4 December - Just 2 weeks after a highly worrying resistance gene called mcr-1 was first identified in China, Danish researchers report that it has existed in their country since at least 2012. After Chinese researchers reported their findings Nov 18 in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, mcr-1 whole-genome sequencing data were made available to other investigators. And researchers from [Denmark] used a computer program that quickly maps a bacterium's DNA to identify the gene among bacterial data stored in a Danish database, according to a DTU press release yesterday. They found mcr-1 in *Escherichia coli* samples from a patient who had a blood infection in 2015, as well as in five food samples that have been imported

from 2012 through 2014. "All the bacteria are multiresistant [extended spectrum beta-lactamase] bacteria containing the mcr-1 gene, which can further complicate treatment," according to the release.

[CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

Norovirus suspected at Chipotle visited by 80 sick Boston College students

8 December - Eighty Boston College students fell ill after eating at a Chipotle Mexican Grill restaurant this past weekend, and early test results point to the highly contagious norovirus as the culprit, public health investigators said on Tuesday. Chipotle, already grappling with a multistate E. coli outbreak that has battered the burrito chain's sales and stock price, has temporarily closed the Cleveland Circle restaurant where the Boston College students reported eating. The students are being tested for E. coli and norovirus, which both can cause severe vomiting and diarrhea. Those test results are not expected for at least two days, a university spokesman said. Chipotle on Tuesday said it would not shutter any other outlets in the Boston area. [Reuters](#)

Report: Animal antibiotics pose human health risk

9 December - The misuse and over-use of antibiotics on farm animals is increasing the problem of antimicrobial resistance, or superbugs, in humans, a report prepared for the UK government has warned. The report's authors looked at the results of 139 studies into the use of antibiotics in agriculture and found a link between the routine feeding of antibiotics to animals and the growing number of cases of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. ... The report says the risks associated with the high use of antimicrobials in animal populations are threefold. "Firstly, it presents the risk that drug-resistant strains are passed on through direct contact between humans and animals (notably farmers)," the report says. "Secondly, these drug-resistant strains have the potential to be passed on to humans more generally through the food chain, ie, when consumers prepare or eat the meat itself. "Finally, there is a further indirect threat to human health as result of animal excretion." [Al Jazeera](#)

Two hospitalized, nearly 200 sickened in Seattle norovirus outbreak

7 December - Nearly 200 people who attended a catered party at a downtown Seattle office building have become ill with norovirus, a public health official said on Monday. Public health officials closed all the food-service locations inside the Russell Investments Center in downtown Seattle, including a Starbucks location, said Dr. Meagan Kay, a medical epidemiologist for the public health department. ... Nearly 200 people out of roughly 600 people who attended the party catered by California-based Bon Appetit Management Co on Tuesday reported some level of sickness, Kay said. That number is likely to go up as the investigation continues into the cause of the outbreak, she said. [Reuters](#)

U.S. sales of antibiotics for food animals rose over six years: FDA

10 December - U.S. sales of medically important antibiotics approved for use in livestock rose by 23 percent between 2009 and 2014, federal regulators said on Thursday, fueling concerns about risks to humans from antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Last year, domestic sales and distribution of such drugs increased by 3 percent, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. [Reuters](#)

World's first IVF puppies born to surrogate mother dog



10 December - The world's first "test tube" puppies have been born after years of attempts, say scientists in the US. The in-vitro fertilisation success paves the way for conserving endangered breeds and could help in the fight against human and animal diseases, say researchers at Cornell University. The seven beagle and

cross-bred beagle-spaniel puppies were born to a surrogate mother. They were from the same litter but have three sets of parents. Frozen embryos were implanted in a female dog using techniques similar to those used in human fertility clinics. Problems with freezing embryos have caused difficulties in the past, but the group say they have perfected this and other techniques. [BBC News](#)

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WELLNESS

A protein in the gut may explain why some can't stomach gluten

10 December - ... Researchers are finally homing in on markers for gluten sensitivity in the body. A study from Giovanni Barbara and his team at the University of Bologna, Italy, suggests that gluten-sensitive individuals may harbor high levels of a molecule called zonulin that is linked to inflammation. Levels of zonulin in the blood have been shown to be high in celiacs already. In Barbara's study, levels in gluten-sensitive individuals almost matched those of celiacs. Though the results are preliminary, they point in a hopeful direction for future tests to help diagnose this controversial condition. ... Zonulin is triggered by harmful bacteria, and offers important protection to the body: If you accidentally eat a food contaminated with salmonella, you rely on zonulin to help trigger diarrhea and flush out the bugs. [NPR](#)

Chemical flavorings found in e-cigarettes linked to lung disease

8 December - Diacetyl, a flavoring chemical linked to cases of severe respiratory disease, was found in more than 75 percent of flavored electronic cigarettes and refill liquids tested by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Two other related, potentially harmful compounds were also found in many of the tested flavors, which included varieties with potential appeal to young people such as cotton candy, "Fruit Squirts," and cupcake. ... The Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the flavoring industry have warned workers about diacetyl because of the association between inhaling the chemical and the debilitating respiratory disease bronchiolitis obliterans, colloquially known as "popcorn lung" because it first appeared in workers who inhaled artificial butter flavor in microwave popcorn processing facilities.

[Harvard Gazette](#)

Computerized cognitive-behavioral therapy for primary care patients with depression

8 December - In a randomized trial, computer-based CBT offered little or no benefit beyond usual care. Evidence suggests that computerized cognitive-behavioral therapy (cCBT) is useful for treating patients with depression, but previous studies of this approach have had methodical flaws. In this multicenter trial from the U.K., researchers evaluated cCBT as an adjunct to usual care in nearly 700 adult primary care patients with depression. ... Patients were randomized to usual care plus either "Beating the Blues" (a commercially available cCBT program) or "MoodGYM" (a free cCBT program), or to usual care alone. ... At 4 months, about half the patients in each group remained depressed, with no significant differences between groups. A small benefit for "MoodGYM" was observed at 12 months, but 24-month outcomes again were similar in the three groups. Results also were similar on measures of health-related quality of life and psychological wellbeing. Although most "Beating the Blues" and "MoodGYM" patients accessed their assigned programs, only 18% and 16%, respectively, completed them.

[NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Endurance athletes may pay physical price

4 December - The endurance competition known as the Ultraman could lead to muscle damage associated with insulin resistance, a new study reveals. Ultraman athletes may also experience higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol and a drop in their testosterone levels. These negative health effects are temporary but call into question the long-term health of people who train for and compete in these races on a regular basis, researchers from Florida State University caution. ... The study, recently published online in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology*, found that, overall, the athletes lost body fat but they didn't lose weight because they retained fluid. The researchers also found noticeable signs of muscle damage, which suggests the competitors experienced reduced insulin sensitivity.

When muscles became less sensitive to insulin, blood sugar levels increase -- a symptom associated with type 2 diabetes, the study authors said. [MedlinePlus](#)

Even in the NICU, babies exposed to nicotine

5 December - Infants in the NICU whose mothers were smokers were exposed to nicotine from their environment, which also showed up in their urine, according to the results of a small pilot study. [Researchers] examined five case studies of mothers who were smokers and had infants in the NICU. They found detectable levels of nicotine on various NICU surfaces and furniture, including infant crib/incubators. ... [Levels] of thirdhand smoke (THS) -- that is, residual nicotine and other smoke components deposited on surfaces -- were lowest on incubators and cribs. Northrup and colleagues described them as in the lower range of "smoking households that ban indoor smoking." THS levels on furniture were in the average range of these smoking households. Infant urine tests came back positive for cotinine, an alkaloid in tobacco that is the main metabolite of nicotine, as well as trans-3-hydroxycotinine or 3HC (cotinine's major metabolite) and NNAL, another biomarker that measures exposure to tobacco smoke. [MedPage Today](#)

HIV rates fall, but not all groups benefit, U.S. study finds

7 December - The number of Americans diagnosed with HIV each year declined by about one-fifth during the past decade, but not all groups saw drops in prevalence, a federal government study shows. Between 2005 and 2014, the overall annual number of HIV diagnoses fell 19 percent -- from nearly 48,800 to just over 39,700 a year. The drop was led by a 63 percent decline among injection drug users, a 42 percent drop among black women, and a 35 percent decrease among heterosexuals. However, annual HIV diagnoses among gay and bisexual men actually rose about 6 percent during the study period, from about 25,000 to just over 26,600 a year, although they recently stabilized at less than a 1 percent increase a year. [MedlinePlus](#)

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USAFRICOM

Africa: Men's self-image puts them in danger of dying from AIDS

9 December - Men's self-image as strong, sexually active risk-takers means they are more likely to die from HIV/AIDS than are women, experts said on Wednesday, calling for more HIV workplace testing to reach men and greater efforts to change gender norms. Although six out of ten Africans with HIV are women, men are 25 percent more likely to die from the disease, according to research by the Africa Centre for Health and Population Studies in South Africa, which has the world's biggest AIDS epidemic. ... Men are less likely to test for

HIV, less likely to start or adhere to antiretroviral therapy (ART) to manage the disease and more likely to start treatment late and die. ... Men will soon make up almost 70 percent of AIDS-related deaths in some high-prevalence countries, the paper said, even though rates of HIV infection among women aged 15 to 24 are twice as high as those of men the same age. [VOA News](#)

Ethiopia: 10 million in Ethiopia face hunger after worst drought in decades

8 December - Ethiopia is dealing with its worst drought in 50 years. Save the Children has launched an urgent call for food aid but says that is only a temporary fix and world leaders meeting in Paris must act on climate change. Ethiopia's government says a staggering 10.1 million people will face critical food shortages in 2016 — and that more than half of those are children. Adding to that, an estimated 400,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. ... John Graham, Save the Children's Country Director in Ethiopia, says this year's crisis is the result of a cascade of meteorological dominoes — a severe drought related to the El Nino weather phenomenon ruined two major expected rainfalls this year. As a result, the next harvest is not expected to come until June of next year. [VOA News](#)

Nigeria's baby farmers

3 December - ... It is a scam that exploits couples desperate for a baby and young pregnant single mothers - often stigmatised in a country where abortion is illegal except in the most dire medical emergency. It is also a trade that international NGOs have identified as sinister and out of control. Filming undercover, the team find bogus doctors and clinics offering spurious fertility treatments in return for large amounts of money. In their guise as a childless couple, Anas and Rosemary are falsely diagnosed by one dodgy clinician as being unable to conceive children. ... But worse is to come. The team go on to uncover orphanages and clinics that act as brokers for illegal baby sales, by which naive, greedy or simply desperate young mothers are "persuaded" to hand over their newborn children for cash. [Al Jazeera](#)

Report traces Ebola's spread in Liberia

9 December - Ebola viruses that sickened many people during the height of the epidemic in Liberia can be traced back to a single case of the disease probably introduced from Sierra Leone, according to a report published Wednesday in the journal Cell Host and Microbe. "The data are consistent with the vast majority of cases in Liberia coming from a single event," said Jason T. Ladner of the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases. The virus then spread from Liberia back into Guinea, where the current epidemic was first identified. Scientists analyzed genomic sequences from 140 blood samples, nearly 2 percent of all reported cases in Liberia, collected over 11 months, after a smaller outbreak had been controlled. Liberia had no new Ebola cases last week, and a recent cluster was most likely linked to a rare case of transmission from a survivor, officials said Wednesday. [The New York Times](#)

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Iran: Swine flu outbreak kills 33

7 December - An outbreak of swine flu in two south-eastern provinces of Iran has killed at least 33 people over the last three weeks, state media report. Iran's Deputy Health Minister Ali-Akbar Sayyari told the official IRNA news agency 28 had died in Kerman province and five in Sistan-Baluchistan. He warned that the outbreak was likely to spread to other areas of the country, including Tehran. Swine flu is a strain of the influenza virus known as H1N1. ... Another Iranian news agency, ISNA, reported that around 600 people had received hospital treatment after contracting the virus in Kerman province.

[BBC News](#)

Red Cross seeking permission to work in IS territory

6 December - The International Committee of the Red Cross has said it is trying to establish relations with the Islamic State group in hopes of delivering aid to the 10 million people living under its control. "Yes, we are of course looking at building a relationship" with IS, ICRC Director-General Yves Daccord told AFP in an interview. "We have a very clear humanitarian vision. First, what we see is 10 million people. Ten million people under the control of the Islamic State group (in Iraq and Syria). "We are interested in these 10 million people. What happens to them? What are their problems?" ... The emergence of armed groups which at times disregard the need for life-saving aid is one of the threats facing the ICRC and groups like it, Daccord said. Organisations seeking to help civilians engulfed by conflict will increasingly need to connect with such groups, regardless of their ideology, he told AFP. [Yahoo! News](#)

Saudi Arabia: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

4 December - Between 2 and 27 November 2015, the National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia notified WHO of 3 additional cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection, including 2 deaths. ... Globally, since September 2012, WHO has been notified of 1,621 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including at least 584 related deaths. [WHO](#)

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Gaza's crumbling healthcare system

6 December - ... Several Gaza Strip hospitals are six decades old. Nasser hospital, the main facility serving the southern Khan Younis district, was built under Egyptian rule in the late

1950s and named after Gamal Abdel Nasser, the former president. Three of the five main buildings at Shifa are from the same era, and two are now collapsing: I... Even if funds were secured, progress could be further stalled by Israeli restrictions on building materials entering the territory. ... The frailties of Gaza's health sector are deep and diverse. One year ago, maintenance and cleaning companies went on strike after failing to receive their salaries, and the ensuing financial crunch forced hospitals to stop serving patients' meals. Charity organisations stepped in to help fill the void. [Al Jazeera](#)

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USNORTHCOM

U.S.: Arizona reports concurrent West Nile, St Louis encephalitis outbreak

10 December - Arizona residents are experiencing the first known outbreak of concurrent West Nile virus (WNV) and St. Louis encephalitis virus (SLEV) infections in the United States, and most cases involve neurologic disease, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported. ... The viruses, both flaviviruses, are carried by Culex mosquitoes. As of Nov 24, 117 cases of flavivirus disease had been reported to the Arizona Department of Health Services, including 75 WNV, 19 SLEV, and 23 unspecified flavivirus disease cases. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

U.S.: Bringing the Common Rule into the 21st century

10 December - On September 8, 2015, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and 15 other federal departments and agencies issued a proposal to revise the regulations governing the ethical conduct of research involving humans. ... The two central goals of the proposed revisions to the Common Rule are to enhance respect and safeguards for research participants and to increase research efficiency by reducing unnecessary burdens and calibrating oversight to the level of risk. If they are ultimately adopted, the key changes will require consent for research involving biospecimens, allow participants to grant broad consent for future use of data and biospecimens, strengthen privacy and security safeguards to prevent unauthorized disclosure and use of data and biospecimens, streamline institutional review board (IRB) operations by requiring reliance on a single IRB for multisite studies conducted in the United States, and exclude some nonresearch activities and low-risk research from the rule, while exempting other low-risk research from certain requirements. [New England Journal of Medicine](#)

U.S.: Congress still limits health research on gun violence

8 December - ... [Policymakers] may be stymied by the dearth of public health research into both gun violence and deaths that involve the police. One big obstacle: congressional

restrictions on funding of such research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ... The CDC doesn't systematically collect data on deaths at the hands of law enforcement, and there's actually a law that effectively stops it from doing research on gun violence. The authorization doesn't explicitly forbid research; rather, it says that no funds may be used "to advocate or promote gun control." ... "All the debate for several decades now has been carried out on the basis of opinion and ideology and assertion and political stance, rather than the evidence," says Nancy Krieger, an epidemiologist at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. If the government could collect detailed data on gun violence, researchers might see patterns and come up with interventions that could reduce the number of deaths, they say. Krieger wants to see the same type of data on deaths that involve law enforcement. ... So in a paper published Tuesday in the journal *PLOS Medicine*, Krieger and several colleagues call for the CDC to declare law-enforcement-related deaths a so-called notifiable condition. That means public health workers — not police — would be required to report such deaths to a state or local agency. [NPR](#)

U.S.: DOJ antitrust unit subpoenas Mylan over pricing of doxycycline

4 December - The antitrust division of the U.S. Department of Justice has subpoenaed Mylan N.V. for information relating to the pricing and marketing of its generic doxycycline antibiotic products, the drugmaker said on Friday. The Department of Justice has also sought information on any communication with competitors about the anti-bacterial products, the company said in a regulatory filing, adding it would cooperate with the federal agency. The nearly 40-year-old antibiotic is used to treat bacterial infections such as acne, pneumonia, Lyme disease, chlamydia and syphilis. ... U.S. drugmakers have been under increased pressure from the government, insurers and corporations over steep increases in the prices of generic drugs. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Driving under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, and alcohol and marijuana combined among persons aged 16–25 years

11 December - ... The prevalence of drinking and driving among high school students aged 16–19 years has declined by 54%, from 22.3% in 1991 to 10.3% in 2011. ... During 2002–2014, the prevalence of driving under the influence of alcohol alone significantly declined by 59% among persons aged 16–20 years (from 16.2% in 2002 to 6.6% in 2014; $p < 0.001$) and 38% among persons 21–25 years (from 29.1% in 2002 to 18.1% in 2014; $p < 0.001$). In addition, the prevalence of driving under the influence of alcohol and marijuana combined significantly declined by 39%, from 2.3% in 2002 to 1.4% in 2014 ($p < 0.001$) among persons aged 16–20 years and from 3.1% in 2002 to 1.9% in 2014 ($p < 0.001$) among persons aged 21–25 years. The prevalence of driving under the influence of marijuana alone declined 18%, from 3.8% in 2002 to 3.1% in 2014 ($p = 0.05$) only among persons aged 16–20 years.

[Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S.: FDA clears military traumatic wound dressing for use in the civilian population

7 December - Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration cleared the use of the XSTAT 30 wound dressing, an expandable, multi-sponge dressing used to control severe, life-threatening bleeding from wounds in areas that a tourniquet cannot be placed (such as the groin or armpit) in battlefield and civilian trauma settings. The clearance expands the device's indication from use by the military only to use in adults and adolescents in the general population. Early control of severe bleeding may prevent shock and may be life-saving. According to the United States Army Institute of Surgical Research, 30 to 40 percent of civilian deaths by traumatic injury are the result of hemorrhaging. Of those deaths, 33 to 56 percent occur before the patient reaches a hospital. [FDA](#)

U.S.: Infant mortality down, Alzheimer's deaths up

10 December - The U.S. infant mortality rate declined 2.3% from 2013 to 2014, reaching a record low of 582.1 per 100,000 live births, according to data released on Wednesday by the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics. At the same time, deaths from Alzheimer disease rose 8.1%, to 25.4 per 100,000 population. As in 2013, Alzheimer's was the sixth leading cause of death in 2014. Since 2012, life expectancy at birth has held steady at 78.8 years — the highest it's ever been. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

U.S.: Public health gets least money, but does most

8 December - Just three cents of each U.S. health care dollar goes to public health even though it plays a far bigger role in keeping Americans well than medical care, a top federal official said at a forum presented by USA TODAY and insurer Cigna. State and local public health departments were hit especially hard by the recession and haven't recovered, said physician Karen DeSalvo, acting assistant secretary of health at the Department of Health and Human Services. ... Even though 80% of people's health is influenced by what happens outside of doctor's offices and hospitals, about 97% of funding goes to pay for medical services, DeSalvo said. [USA TODAY](#)

U.S.: Tularemia cases now top 100

4 December - Cases of tularemia in four US states have reached at least 104 for 2015, according to federal and state officials. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in today's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* that Colorado has reported 43 cases, Nebraska 21, South Dakota 20, and Wyoming 16, for 100 total cases. South Dakota, however, in its most recent infectious disease summary, which covers the year through September, reported 24 tularemia cases, which brings the total to 104. That compares with about 125 in the entire previous decade. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

U.S.: Yale–ACLU report questions Ebola quarantines

3 December - [A report](#) released today examining the U.S. response to the 2014–2015 Ebola epidemic warns against politically motivated and scientifically unwarranted quarantines,

which the report found violated individuals' rights and hampered efforts to fight the disease by discouraging American doctors and nurses from going abroad. The report was written by students and faculty of the Yale Global Health Justice Partnership (GHJP), which is a joint program of the Yale School of Public Health and Yale Law School, and the staff of the American Civil Liberties Union. The foreword was written by the president of Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières USA, which was the primary international medical aid group that fought the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. [Yale Law School](#)

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USPACOM

China: Beijing issues first red smog alert

7 December - Schools in Beijing are to close and outdoor construction to stop after the Chinese capital issued its first "red alert" over smog levels. The red alert is the highest possible, and has not been used in the city before, the state-run Xinhua news agency says. Authorities expect more than three consecutive days of severe smog. Cars with odd and even number plates will be banned from driving on alternate days. ... Current pollution levels in Beijing are actually lower than last week's, but the red alert has been placed because of levels expected over the coming days. [BBC News](#)

French Polynesia: Eight Guillain-Barre cases noted in chikungunya outbreak

4 December - French Polynesian and French scientists ... reported a cluster of the neurologic condition Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS) in nine patients who had chikungunya during a recent outbreak in French Polynesia. The patients were admitted to a tertiary hospital for GBS symptoms at some point from November 2014 through February 2015. The island experienced an outbreak of about 66,000 chikungunya cases from October 2014 through March 2015. The patients ranged in age from 37 to 77 years, with a median age of 48. Six of the patients were men. ... Weakness and paralysis progressed from the lower to upper limbs in eight patients, while the ninth had only facial involvement. Four required intensive care. ... The authors wrote, "GBS had already been associated with several arboviral diseases including chikungunya virus infections, but a cluster as we reported here had never been described."

[CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

India: Delhi to limit use of cars in an effort to control pollution

4 December - The notoriously polluted air in the Indian capital has become so bad that the local government is planning to limit the use of private cars to alternate days, among other measures. K.K. Sharma, the chief secretary of Delhi, told reporters on Friday that starting Jan.

1, the days when a private car would be allowed on the streets would depend on whether its license plate ended in an even or odd number. ... He added that public transportation would be increased to make up for the restriction on private cars. The government also said it would shut down a power plant in the capital that burns coal and inspect trucks at the border to make sure they comply with emissions regulations. [The New York Times](#)

Sri Lanka: \$675 million plan to harness floods

7 December - As delegates in Paris search for new ways to mitigate the effects of climate change, an innovative scheme that does exactly that is in the works in Sri Lanka. Struck by a worsening cycle of floods and droughts, the Indian Ocean nation has begun planning for a \$675 million project to capture heavy rainfall that can be used for irrigation in dry periods, as well as generating electricity. The project will see two new reservoirs built, and 260 kilometres of canals that link existing reservoirs upgraded, across Sri Lanka's "dry zone", which stretches through the north of the country. Some of the extra water will also be funnelled into existing hydropower dams to generate 250 MW of new electricity. [IRIN](#)

U.S.: Hawaii dengue cases grow to 139

7 December - The Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) said today that the number of locally acquired dengue fever cases has risen by 27 in less than a week, for a total of 139 cases on the big island of Hawaii. Of the confirmed cases of dengue fever, 122 are in Hawaii residents and 17 involve visitors. Most of the total cases (78%, or 108) have occurred in adults, while 31 cases (22%) involve children. Illness onset occurred from Sep 11 to Nov 28. ... High- and moderate-risk areas for dengue fever currently lie along the western and eastern coasts of the big island. State health officials continue to conduct vector control activities and monitor for imported cases. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

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USSOUTHCOM

Brazil microcephaly cases rise by more than 500

8 December - Brazil's health ministry today reported another steep increase in the number of microcephaly cases, with the detection of 513 more instances, lifting the total to 1,761 cases this year. The increase was noted in a ministry statement translated and posted by Avian Flu Diary (AFD). The ministry said the increase came despite a recent change in diagnostic criteria from a head circumference of 33 cm to 32 cm. Health officials in Brazil sounded the alarm about an association between a Zika virus outbreak in the northeastern part of the country with an usual increase in microcephaly cases. Lab findings in some pregnant women and in one baby who died have also hinted at a Zika virus link, and similar neurologic anomalies have also been reported in a recent Zika virus outbreak in French Polynesia. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

Chikungunya case total climbs by more than 17,000

7 December - Regions in the Americas and Caribbean reported 17,398 recent cases of chikungunya, bringing the outbreak total to 1,788,058, according to a Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) update late last week. ... Honduras, reporting on 12 weeks of data, had the most cases, 10,168, to raise its 2015 total to 82,008. Colombia, which often has the most cases, was next, with 3,450 new cases to bring its 2015 total to 354,298 cases. Brazil, reporting 6 weeks of data, had 2,506 new cases and 15,650 for the year. Many countries, however, have not reported on chikungunya for weeks.

[CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

Panama: Large cluster involving fever, rash prompted Zika testing

7 December - The World Health Organization (WHO) on Dec 5 confirmed Panama's first Zika virus infections and provided details on the cases. The first locally acquired cases in the country were first reported last week by local media. The illnesses were detected after Panama's ministry of health was alerted on Nov 27 of 68 patients with fever and rash on Ustupu island, in Guna Yala province. Samples were obtained from 43 patients, of whom 30 were symptomatic, and sent for testing at the Commemorative Gorgas Institute for Health Studies in Panama. Samples were negative for dengue and chikungunya. Three of 30 samples from symptomatic patients were positive for Zika virus. The patients are all women, age 29, 48, and 58. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

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The *Army Public Health Weekly Update* is published by the Public Health Information Directorate, Army Public Health Center.

