11 May 2018

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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U.S. MILITARY

Child-on-child sexual assault problem at bases worse than previously reported, military officials disclose

7 May - U.S. military officials have sought to ward off congressional efforts to address child-on-child sexual assaults on bases, even as they disclose that the problem is larger than previously acknowledged. Members of Congress expressed alarm and demanded answers after an Associated Press investigation revealed that reports of sexual violence among kids on U.S. military bases and at Pentagon-run schools are getting lost in a dead zone of justice that often leaves both victim and offender without help. With at least three potential legislative fixes being drafted, military officials have had a clear message during briefings with lawmakers and their staffs: We can handle this on our own. ... In March, AP documented nearly 600 sex assault cases among children and teens on U.S. bases worldwide over a 10-year period. Military Times top of page...

In veterans, even a mild case of traumatic brain injury is linked to an increased risk of dementia

7 May - ... [A] new study shows that mild traumatic brain injuries can have serious consequences for military veterans by raising their risk of dementia. Researchers who examined the medical records of more than 350,000 Americans who served during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan found that men and women who experienced at least one mild TBI were more than twice as likely as their uninjured peers to develop dementia after they retired from the military. ... The more serious a veteran's brain injury, the greater the risk that he or she would subsequently develop dementia. After accounting for factors like age, medical history and psychiatric conditions that could affect the results, the researchers found that those who experienced a mild TBI without losing consciousness were 2.36 times more likely to develop dementia during the study period than those in the control group. Los Angeles Times top of page...


April 2018 - Among active component service members in 2017, there were 492 incident diagnoses of rhabdomyolysis likely due to exertional rhabdomyolysis, for an unadjusted
incidence rate of 40.2 cases per 100,000 person-years. Subgroup-specific rates in 2017 were highest among males, those aged 19 years or younger, non-Hispanic black service members, Marine Corps or Army members, recruit trainees, and those in “other” or combat-specific occupations. During 2013–2017, crude rates of exertional rhabdomyolysis increased steadily from 2013 through 2016, after which rates declined slightly in 2017. Compared to service members in other race/ethnicity groups, the overall rate of exertional rhabdomyolysis was highest among non-Hispanic blacks. Overall and annual rates were highest among Marine Corps members, intermediate among those in the Army, and lowest among those in the Air Force and Navy. Most cases of exertional rhabdomyolysis were diagnosed at installations that support basic combat/recruit training or major ground combat units of the Army or the Marine Corps. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

Veterans ask court to reinstate lawsuits over burn pits in Iraq, Afghanistan

9 May - Veterans and their families asked a federal appeals court Wednesday to reinstate dozens of lawsuits alleging that a government contractor caused health problems by using burn pits during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 60 lawsuits allege that KBR Inc. — a former Halliburton subsidiary — dumped tires, batteries, medical waste and other materials into open burn pits, creating harmful smoke that caused gastrointestinal illnesses, neurological problems, respiratory problems, cancers and other health issues in more than 800 service members. Last year, a judge in Maryland dismissed the lawsuits, finding that the U.S. military made all of the key decisions and had control over KBR’s use and operation of burn pits. The lower court found that analyzing military decision-making during war is a political question not appropriate for judicial review. Army Times

App technology allows medics to view 999 patients

10 May - A new app which allows air ambulance services to view patients before they arrive to treat them is being trialled in two areas of England. The GoodSam app sends a link to the 999 caller’s mobile phone, which opens live streaming. Medics can then assess how seriously ill a patient is before setting off. Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance and Great North Air Ambulance Service are currently testing the system, and results so far have been promising. Prof Richard Lyon, associate medical director of Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance, said: “It's game-changing.” He added: “Time is critical in saving a person's life or reducing long-term disability, and often we have limited information from bystanders about a patient’s or multiple patients’ injuries to make decisions. BBC News
Booze, drugs, skipping earplugs linked to hearing loss at concerts

4 May - Temporary hearing loss after a concert may be more likely in people who drink, use drugs and avoid earplugs, a small Dutch experiment suggests. Researchers studied 51 people at an outdoor music festival in Amsterdam, asking half of them to wear earplugs. All but two of the participants drank alcohol during the show, and 11 of them, or 22 percent, reported drug use. Earplugs, as expected, appeared to minimize the risk of hearing loss in tests done after the 4.5-hour show. But alcohol and drug use were independently associated with temporary hearing difficulties, even when people used earplugs. Reuters

could future nerve implants detect and monitor illness?

10 May - ... [Theodoros] Zanos and his colleagues are working on technology they hope might one day be able to listen to and decode the body’s electrical signals, catching warning signs of illness. ... It will take a significant amount of time before researchers can diagnose and possibly treat disease using electrical impulses. But Zanos believes some conditions such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease could be monitored with nerve implants in the not-too-distant future. Zanos and colleagues ... published a study this week in PNAS suggesting some basic steps toward this goal. The study, which examined electrical signals in mouse nerves, describes how the researchers isolated and decoded signals related to two different cytokines—molecules that cause inflammation and are also used by cells to communicate inflammatory states and trigger immune responses. Scientific American

dengue study: ‘People showing no symptoms of dengue virus infection are contributing much more than was previously recognized’

4 May - People showing virtually no symptoms are likely the primary source of dengue fever, according to new research published in PLOS Pathogens. Nearly 400 million people each year are infected with dengue virus, which is transmitted through mosquitoes. The study estimates that more than 80 percent of dengue virus infections are attributable to individuals with mild to no symptoms who do not seek treatment from a physician. The study also indicates that nearly a quarter of dengue virus transmission is the result of mosquitoes biting those already infected before the onset of symptoms. By the time those symptoms appear, the opportunity to prevent the virus from spreading has passed. Outbreak News Today
Despite mutations in Makona Ebola virus, disease consistent in mice, monkeys

8 May - Early during the recent Ebola epidemic in West Africa, scientists speculated that the genetic diversity of the circulating Makona strain of virus (EBOV-Makona) would result in more severe disease and more transmissibility than prior strains. However, using two different animal models, National Institutes of Health scientists have determined that certain mutations stabilized early during the epidemic and did not alter Ebola disease presentation or outcome. Their work, published in Cell Reports, offers further evidence to support previous findings from molecular sequencing that the diversity of EBOV-Makona did not significantly impact the course of disease. NIH

Laced with two insecticides, new nets protect children from malaria

4 May - Mosquito nets infused with two pesticides work much better against malaria than those with only one, reducing prevalence in children by 44 percent, according to a recent study. As a result of the report, published in The Lancet last month, the World Health Organization has recommended that the two-chemical nets be used in areas where mosquitoes have developed resistance to the first-line insecticide. The new nets contain pyrethroids, a class of chemicals used in nets for over a decade, along with the newer compound, piperonyl butoxide, which blocks mosquitoes’ ability to break down pyrethroids. The New York Times

Prolonged exposure to air pollution triggers inflammation and progression of cancer genes

9 May - Prolonged exposure to coarse particles of air pollutants trigger inflammation and cause the progression of cancer-related genes, a breakthrough study at Cedars-Sinai suggests. Previous research has linked air pollution to a number of diseases including cancer. The latest findings showed that nickel particles in Los Angeles's heavily polluted air can alter genes related to disease development. ... The authors found that coarse particulate matter in the Los Angeles Basin is absorbed into the body in two ways. First is by inhalation through the lungs, where metal particles enter the bloodstream to the brain. The other way is through the nose, where trace metals enter faster to the brain. Tech Times

Scientists discover roadblocks that stop brain white matter healing

7 May - A new study identifies a molecule that may be critical to the repair of white matter, the fatty tissue wrapped around parts of brain cells that helps speed up communication.
Damage to white matter is associated with several conditions, including multiple sclerosis and cerebral palsy, and can occur in the brains of preterm babies. New findings suggest that the molecule triggers a pathway that is normally used by the immune system to prevent excessive damage but may contribute to chronic white matter injury by completely blocking repair operations. “This study uncovers a new player in white matter disease and identifies a potential drug target,” said Jim Koenig, Ph.D., program director at NINDS.

Scientists uncover brain circuits behind putting up a fight or freezing in place

10 May - In a study of mice, National Institutes of Health-funded researchers describe a new circuit involved in fine-tuning the brain’s decision either to hide or confront threats. A team of researchers ... investigated the role of the ventral midline thalamus (vMT) in determining how animals respond to visual threats. The thalamus is a brain region that acts as a relay station, taking in sensory information, such as what is seen and heard, and sorting out where in the brain to send that information. Dr. [Andrew] Huberman and his colleagues showed that the vMT was activated when mice were confronted with a threat, specifically a black circle that grew larger on top of their cage, mimicking the experience of something looming over them. When faced with the looming threat, the mice spent most of the time freezing or hiding and very little time rattling their tails, which is typically an aggressive response. ... [D]esigner drugs that allowed specific circuits to be turned on and off. Although inactivating the vMT had no effect on freezing and hiding, it eliminated the tail rattling response. Turning on the vMT increased the number of tail shaking responses and caused the mice to move around more and spend less time hiding or freezing.

Study looks at possibility of sexual transmission of dengue

8 May - Researchers from the National Institute for Infectious Diseases ‘Lazzaro Spallanzani’, IRCCS, Rome, Italy highlight the possibility of sexual transmission of dengue virus in a man returning from Thailand to Italy where dengue virus RNA was persistently detected in semen samples up to 37 days post-symptom onset, in a recent study in the journal Eurosurveillance. According to the abstract: This study reports the presence of dengue virus RNA in longitudinally collected semen samples of a previously healthy Caucasian man, returning to Italy from Thailand with primary dengue fever, up to 37 days post-symptom onset, when viraemia and viruria were undetectable. This finding, coupled with the evidence of dengue virus negative-strand RNA, an indirect marker of ongoing viral replication, in the cellular fraction of semen, indicates a need to further investigate possible sexual transmission.
Study shows malaria parasite collects in bone marrow

8 May - A study today in the journal *mbio* shows that, in addition to circulating in blood, *Plasmodium vivax*, a parasite that causes malaria, also accumulates in bone marrow. *P vivax* causes most malaria infections outside of sub-Saharan Africa and is a significant public health burden. Though not as deadly as *P falciparum*, *P vivax* still infects tens of thousands of people annually, sometimes leading to severe and fatal symptoms. This is the first time *P vivax* has been detected in bone marrow, and the discovery paints a more insidious picture of the parasite. By using bone marrow as a reservoir, the parasite is able to replicate mostly undetected in a person. *P vivax* gametocytes, cells that are essential for transmission, mature quickly in the bone marrow and can be transmitted to mosquitoes before the onset of illness. *CIDRAP News*

Zika babies born normal stay normal -- so far

8 May - Babies exposed to Zika virus in utero but who are born with normal neuroimaging appear to develop in much the same way as do unexposed infants, a researcher said here. At 6 months of age, the infants had neuromotor skills similar to those of unexposed controls, according to Sarah Mulkey, MD, of Children’s National Health System in Bethesda, Md. And a difference seen on one test is likely the result of culture rather than biology, Mulkey said at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies. *MedPage Today*

INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 17:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity continued to be minimal for the majority of states, with low activity in only five states.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity in EUCOM remained minimal for all countries.
- PACOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in PACOM, except for the Republic of Korea which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in CENTCOM locations with available data.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in Honduras for week 17.

*DHA - Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch*
CDC: Flu View - Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 17 (April 22-28, 2018), influenza activity decreased in the United States.
- Viral Surveillance: Overall, influenza A(H3) viruses have predominated this season. Since early March, influenza B viruses have been more frequently reported than influenza A viruses. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories decreased.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.
- Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths: Three influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. CDC

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 17/2018 (23 - 29 April 2018)
- Influenza activity was at inter-season levels in all but one reporting country.
- While low in number, 11% of the individuals sampled from primary healthcare settings tested positive for influenza viruses (compared to 12% in the previous week).
- Both influenza virus types A and B were co-circulating with the majority being type A. European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

Experts review 1918 pandemic, warn flu is global threat

7 May - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) partnered with Emory University to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1918 flu with a symposium about influenza pandemics: when and if they will strike, how ready the United States is to confront a pandemic, and how to do so. "The more I learn about flu, the less I know," said Michael Osterholm PhD, MPH, director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, publisher of CIDRAP News, as he began his remarks on the challenges of anticipating the next pandemic. Osterholm’s sentiment was echoed by others throughout the day-long event. No one argued that the United States is prepared to face a flu pandemic, as experts explained the current status of avian flu viruses, a universal vaccine, and challenges to preparedness. CIDRAP News

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

3 May - Febrile respiratory illness cases:
- Military Recruits - 24 positive of 44 tested
• CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 25 positive of 64 tested
• DoD Beneficiaries – 1 positive of 11 tested. Naval Health Research Center

USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global Respiratory Pathogen Surveillance Program

During 15 - 28 April 2018 (Surveillance Weeks 16 & 17), a total of 222 specimens were collected and received from 45 locations. Results were finalized for 212 specimens from 43 locations. The percent influenza positive for Weeks 16 and 17 were 24% and 13%, respectively. The influenza percent positive for the season is approximately 36%.

U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Canada reports 6 cases tied to US romaine lettuce *E coli* outbreak

10 May - The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) yesterday confirmed that six Canadian *Escherichia coli* infections are tied to the 29-state US outbreak in which contaminated romaine lettuce has been implicated. Two of the cases are in Saskatchewan, two in Ontario, and one each in British Columbia and Alberta. Genetic fingerprinting of *E coli* samples from the patients linked them to the US outbreak. The patients range in age from 13 to 68, and four are female. Two of the patients reported traveling to the United States before they fell ill. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

FDA approves Kindred treatment for problem weight loss in cats

7 May - Kindred Biosciences Inc has received the first U.S. approval for a treatment for unintended weight loss in cats, opening the door to a market it says extends to up to 9 million potential cases in the United States alone. Miraztm, which helps cats gain weight, combats the potentially fatal disease and is applied to the cat’s inner ear once a day, avoiding what can be difficult oral treatment. “Based on our market research, we estimate that veterinarians in the U.S. see as many as 9 million cats each year with unintended weight loss due to various underlying conditions,” Chief Executive Officer Richard Chin said in a statement. Reuters
Hepatitis A outbreak definitely involves mainstream population

7 May - In recent months, these headlines popped up in a Google search for “Hepatitis A Outbreak” — “KY hepatitis A outbreak kills 3 people, hospitalizes hundreds” “20th death reported in San Diego’s hepatitis A outbreak” “Michigan posts 25th hepatitis A death.” And on May 4, the Indiana State Department of Health posted an outbreak update reporting 91 confirmed cases, with a 48 percent hospitalization rate. ... The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared the multi-state outbreak in March 2017. Since then, at least 1,200 cases have been reported, and more than 40 people have died of the highly contagious liver infection. ... While officials are pointing primarily to cases among people who are homeless and/or substance abusers and their close direct contacts. However, there are increasing reports of infected people who are neither homeless nor substance abusers. More cases of the highly contagious virus are also being confirmed in foodservice employees in the outbreak states. Food Safety News

Multistate outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 infections linked to romaine lettuce

9 May - ... Since the last update on May 2, 2018, 28 more ill people were added to this outbreak. As of May 8, 2018, 149 people infected with the outbreak strain of E. coli O157:H7 have been reported from 29 states. A list of the states and the number of cases in each can be found on the Case Count Map page. Illnesses started on dates ranging from March 13, 2018 to April 25, 2018. Ill people range in age from 1 to 88 years, with a median age of 30. Sixty-five percent of ill people are female. Of 129 people with information available, 64 (50%) have been hospitalized, including 17 people who developed hemolytic uremic syndrome, a type of kidney failure. One death was reported from California. Illnesses that occurred after April 17, 2018, might not yet be reported due to the time it takes between when a person becomes ill with E. coli and when the illness is reported. This takes an average of two to three weeks. CDC

Study: Israeli camels exposed to MERS, but no sign of virus circulation

7 May - Tests on camels and their relatives in Israel, a country that hasn't reported any human MERS-CoV cases, found that although the animals may have been exposed to the virus in the past, there wasn't any sign of active circulation during the study period, according to researchers who looked at blood and nasal swabs collected from 2012 to 2017. ... [R]esearchers from Israel and Erasmus Medical Center in the Netherlands said evidence for MERS-CoV in dromedary camels has been reported for nearly all of the Middle East, except for Israel. ... [T]hey said
the dromedary camel population in Israel is thought to range between 3,000 and 5,000, many of them kept by semi-nomadic Bedouin people in the Negev Desert. CIDRAP News

WELLNESS

Eat less saturated, trans fats to curb heart disease: WHO

4 May - Adults and children should consume a maximum of 10 percent of their daily calories in the form of saturated fat such as meat and butter and one percent from trans fats to reduce the risk of heart disease, the World Health Organization said on Friday. The draft recommendations, the first since 2002, are aimed at reducing non-communicable diseases, led by cardiovascular diseases, blamed for 72 percent of the 54.7 million estimated deaths worldwide every year, many before the age of 70. … The dietary recommendations are based on scientific evidence developed in the last 15 years, he added. The United Nations agency has invited public comments until June 1 on the recommendations, which it expects to finalize by year-end. Reuters

Effect of a health care professional communication training intervention on adolescent human papillomavirus vaccination

7 May – Question: Does implementation of an intervention to improve primary care professionals’ human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine communication lead to increases in adolescent human papillomavirus vaccination?

Finding: Among 43 132 patients at 16 practices participating in this cluster randomized clinical trial, a 5-component intervention significantly increased HPV vaccine series initiation, stopped decline of completion, and was effective for both boys and girls. Two specific intervention components, communication training and customized HPV fact sheets, were the most used and useful based on health care professionals’ report.

Meaning: Disseminating this intervention widely among primary care professionals could substantially increase national adolescent HPV vaccination levels, particularly among boys. Journal of the American Medical Association

HPV vaccination coverage low amid promising signs in males

7 May - An analysis of insurance company claims from 2007 through 2014 found low uptake of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine in both girls and boys, despite a federal recommendation that has been in place for girls since 2006 and for boys since 2011. … The researchers looked at participants who were ages 11 to 18 in 2006 and were continuously
enrolled from 2006 through 2014, which included 916,513 females and 951,082 males. They looked at coverage of one or more HPV vaccine dose by sex, birth cohort, and calendar year. For females, the proportion beginning vaccination at age 11 to 12 years old was low in 2008 and 2010 (12.6% and 11.1%, respectively), rising to 15.7% in 2012 and 19.5% in 2014. In comparison, for same-aged males, vaccination initiation was 0.9% in 2010, rising to 8.3% in 2012 and 15.1% in 2014. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

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Now that calorie labels are federal law, will we eat less?

7 May - Well, it's official. Beginning today, all restaurant chains in the U.S. with 20 or more locations must post calories on menus or menu boards. When Congress passed the Affordable Care Act, back in 2010, the federal calorie posting mandate was born. ... “Surveys show consumers overwhelmingly want this information,” FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb wrote in his blog. And what's the evidence calorie counts will nudge people to cut back? A review by the Cochrane Collaborative, which analyzed several studies, found that calorie labels seem to reduce the number of calories people purchase by an estimated 50 calories per meal. "That may sound like a small amount," writes Gottlieb. It comes out to less than a cookie a day, he points out. "But over a year, based on that sort of reduction, you could end up consuming 10,000 to 20,000 fewer calories, making you three to five pounds slimmer."

NPR

Poor sleep quality explains some racial differences in drowsy driving

9 May - Black and Hispanic drivers are at twice the risk of falling asleep at the wheel compared to whites, and differences in sleep quality explain at least some of the disparity between blacks and whites, a U.S. study suggests. Based on surveys covering nearly 200,000 adults across 35 states, researchers found that sleep-quality-related symptoms like feeling sleepy during the day, getting too little sleep and snoring accounted for about 25 percent of the disparity in drowsy driving incidents between blacks and whites, but didn’t explain the higher rates among Hispanics. More research is needed to explain and address this significant public health issue, the study team writes in the journal Sleep Health. Reuters

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Tobacco smoke residue can become airborne again indoors

9 May - You might be breathing chemical residue from tobacco smoke in indoor spaces where no one has smoked for years. This was the surprise finding of a new study. ... Researchers at Drexel University in Philadelphia found that chemicals left on clothing, furniture and other surfaces by tobacco smoke – known as thirdhand smoke — can become airborne and travel through a building’s ventilation system. The researchers measured the air composition in a non-smoking, unoccupied classroom over the course of a month using
an aerosol mass spectrometer. They initially wanted to see what happens to outdoor air particles when they come inside. But they kept noticing a chemical signature that was only indoors and not outdoors. They discovered it consisted of chemicals from thirdhand smoke — and made up 29 percent of the air mass in the room. NPR

Walmart to restrict opioid dispensing at its pharmacies

7 May - Walmart Inc said on Monday it would restrict initial acute opioid prescriptions to no more than a seven-day supply as the retailer aims to curb an opioid epidemic that has plagued the United States. The supply limit will begin within the next 60 days, the company said. In January, Walmart said it would provide its customers filling prescriptions for opioids with a packet of powder that would help them dispose of leftover medication. The company also said on Monday that from Jan. 1, 2020 it would require e-prescriptions for controlled substances, noting that these prescriptions are proven to be less prone to errors and cannot be altered or copied. Reuters

Why do minority women have a higher risk of postpartum depression?

8 May - About 10% to 15% of women in the US have postpartum depression (PPD)—but that estimate is based mostly on women of European ancestry. In black women the rates are doubled, and among Latinas the prevalence is 30% to 43%. ... The researchers recruited 549 women with PPD and 968 without PPD. ... The women with PPD had significantly higher rates of previous psychiatric diagnoses, significantly higher [Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale] total scores, and higher rates of family history of PPD. They also had significantly higher rates of previous diagnoses of major depressive disorder (MDD) (53% vs 15%), although 47% were experiencing their first episode of MDD. Dramatically higher numbers of women with PPD vs without PPD had suicidal thoughts in the month prior to assessment: 36% vs 2%, respectively. Genetic ancestry was not predictive of case status, nor were hormonal influences any different between the 2 groups. Instead, psychiatric history and exposure to adverse life events were significant predictors. Nearly half of all the women with PPD had a lifetime anxiety disorder diagnosis compared with 7% of the controls. ... Women who had experienced multiple adverse life events were 3 times more likely to have PPD. Federal Practitioner

Women's healthcare needs sharper focus, say experts

7 May - Public and private health systems need to do a better job of taking women's healthcare needs into account. ... "Culture change is critical," Laurie Zephyrin, MD, director of reproductive health at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), said last week at the World Health Care Congress annual meeting. "That means welcoming women into [VA] system and not saying, 'Where's your husband? Where's your father?' ... [It includes] having
providers that can care for women, primary care physicians that are trained to care for women so it's a 'one-stop shopping' approach." ... "It's important to understand the changing population -- [in recent years] there has been an over 80% increase in women veterans using the healthcare system. Women are still the fastest growing population of veterans using veterans' healthcare; it's challenging because the system has historically been developed for male veterans." MedPage Today

**Democratic Republic of the Congo: 4 new Ebola cases recorded in north-west DRC**

10 May - At least four new cases of the Ebola virus disease have been reported in Bikoro territory, Equateur province in northwestern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), according to a hospital source on site. According to the source, among the people diagnosed with Ebola, there are also caregivers from Bikoro Hospital. With the previous two cases, the number of confirmed Ebola cases has grown to six and at least 17 others suspected of being infected with Ebola died in this area, according to the Ministry of Health. Xinhua

**Democratic Republic of the Congo: Congo confirms first death in latest Ebola outbreak**

10 May - The Democratic Republic of Congo announced on Thursday the first confirmed death in a new outbreak of Ebola virus and said 11 other people were now confirmed to be infected, including three medical staff. At least 17 people have died since inhabitants of a village in the country's northwest began showing symptoms resembling Ebola in December, according to the World Health Organization. However, those cases were not confirmed through testing. This is the ninth time Ebola has been recorded in the Democratic Republic of Congo since the disease made its first known appearance - near the vast central African country's northern Ebola river - in the 1970s. Reuters

**Democratic Republic of the Congo: WHO officials fear latest Ebola outbreak in Congo could spread to big cities**

9 May - ... While the outbreak is in a remote area where road travel is taxing and slow, one of the towns where cases may be occurring, Bikoro, is a port on a lake that connects to the Congo and Ubangi rivers. That opens up the disturbing specter of infected individuals traveling by boat to DRC's densely populated capital, Kinshasa, or to Brazzaville, the capital of the neighboring Republic of the Congo to the south, or Bangui, the capital of the Central
African Republic to the north. "If it was only the roads, we know that the roads are very bad and that it’s difficult for people to travel. But if you reach Bikoro and you take a boat ... everything could happen," [Pierre] Formenty said in an interview on Wednesday. “For us it’s a worrying situation in a bad context in terms of logistics. And we need to go fast.” The population of Kinshasa is roughly 11.6 million, about 2 million people live in Brazzaville, and the population of Bangui is about 800,000. **STAT**

**Réunion: Dengue update - 2600 cases in 2018**

9 May - In an update on the epidemic of dengue fever on the island of Réunion, French health officials report an additional 356 cases in the past week, bringing the total to 2598 laboratory confirmed or probable cases reported since Jan. 1. There has been 62 hospitalizations to date, including nine cases of severe dengue. **Outbreak News Today**

**USCENTCOM**

**Afghanistan: UN says Afghan air raid in April killed 30 children**

7 May - The U.N. mission to Afghanistan said Monday that 30 children were among those killed in an Afghan air raid last month that officials said targeted insurgents. UNAMA released a report saying that a total of 36 people were killed in the April 2 attack, which it said targeted a religious ceremony attended by hundreds of men and boys in the Dashti Archi district of the northern Kunduz province. It said another 71 people were wounded, including 51 children. The U.N. said it is “not able to confirm the civilian status of each individual killed or injured, nor is the mission in a position to determine the presence or actions of Taliban leaders or units at the time of the airstrike.** **Military Times**

**Yemen: Cholera vaccination campaign starts in Yemen after year delay: WHO**

7 May - The first vaccine campaign against cholera in Yemen has started, 18 months after war and a sanitation crisis triggered an epidemic, but the World Health Organization said it did not yet have permission nationwide to do the vaccinations. Some senior Houthi officials, whose forces control the capital Sanaa, have objected to vaccinations and this has already delayed the program by nearly a year, aid workers say. There have been more than one million suspected cases of cholera in Yemen, and 2,275 recorded deaths since Nov 2016, the WHO says. The oral vaccination campaign, which began in four districts in Aden on Sunday targeting 350,000 people, coincides with the rainy season, which health workers fear could spread the disease further. **Reuters**
Europe: European report warns XDR gonorrhoea threatens future treatment

8 May - European health officials are warning that three recently reported cases of extensively drug-resistant (XDR) gonorrhoea highlight an emerging global threat and indicate a need for action to preserve the last remaining effective treatment for the infection. In a Rapid Risk Assessment published yesterday, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said the three cases of XDR Neisseria gonorrhoeae reported in the United Kingdom and Australia are the first global reports of gonorrhoea with resistance to ceftriaxone and high-level resistance to azithromycin, along with resistance to several other antibiotics. CIDRAP News

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Ukraine: Measles in Ukraine - Cases among adults increase

9 May - The Ukraine Center for Public Health of the Ministry of Health reported an additional 1078 people affected by measles: 479 adults and 599 children in the most recent week. Since the beginning of the year, 13,883 people were affected by measles – 5,603 adults and 8,280 children. During this time, eight people died of the complications of the measles: six children and two adults. While the number of new cases decreased, the number of cases of measles among adults increases. Since the beginning of the year, the proportion of adults with measles has increased from 34% to 44%. According to the current legislation, MMR vaccines procured at the national level cannot be used for adult immunization... [T]he MOH is working to change the regulatory framework. Outbreak News Today

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United Kingdom: Visa clampdown 'hits cancer patients'

9 May - Cancer patients are being put at risk by immigration rules, say specialist doctors. NHS hospital trusts are struggling to recruit genetic counsellors, who identify people at risk of hereditary cancer and other serious conditions. Some hospitals rely on foreign workers, who now find it difficult to get visas as immigration rules have tightened. The Home Office said priority was given to people working in occupations with shortages. ... Cancer specialists are now calling for genetic counselling to be placed on the shortage occupation list, to increase the chances of rota gaps being filled. BBC News

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11 May - Enterovirus (EV) and parechovirus (PeV) infections can cause a variety of illnesses, ranging from asymptomatic infection to severe illness and death. During 2014–2016, reports of EV and PeV peaked in summer and early fall. Enterovirus D68 was the most frequently reported type (56%); echovirus 30, coxsackievirus A6, echovirus 18, and coxsackievirus B3 were also frequently reported. Improved type-based surveillance can inform disease prevention strategies by supporting outbreak detection and guiding the development of new tests and interventions. Improving surveillance would require increasing the number and capacity of participating laboratories and timely reporting. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: ER visits for asthma dropped 38% the year after one of Pittsburgh's biggest polluters shut down

8 May - ... A soon-to-be-published study undertaken by the Allegheny County Health Department found emergency room visits for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) dropped by 37.9 percent in the region the year after [Shenango Coke Works] closed. ER visits for cardiovascular diseases including heart attacks and strokes decreased by 26.5 percent. The health department also monitored air quality in the region before and after the plant closure, and observed that annual levels of particulate matter pollution, which causes higher rates of asthma and heart disease, decreased by 11 percent—from 10.9 to 9.7 micrograms per cubic meter—in the year after the plant stopped its operations. Environmental Health News

U.S.: FDA chief questions protections on drug rebates, stocks fall

3 May - U.S. Food and Drug Administration chief Scott Gottlieb on Thursday questioned whether rebates that drugmakers provide to health insurers should remain protected by federal law, sparking new concerns on Wall Street over efforts to curb drug pricing. Gottlieb was referring to the common practice of pharmaceutical companies setting a high "list price" for a drug, and then lowering the cost for health plans through hefty rebates in exchange for the broadest access to patients. In recent weeks, he has criticized these practices for keeping drug prices high and locking out competitors. "What if we took on this system directly, by having the federal government reexamine the current safe harbor for drug rebates under the Anti-Kickback Statute?" Gottlieb said. Reuters
U.S.: FDA moves to stop rogue clinics from using unapproved stem cell therapies

9 May - The Food and Drug Administration said on Wednesday that it was seeking court orders to stop two clinics from using unapproved stem cell treatments that in some cases have seriously harmed patients. The clinics remove fat from patients’ bellies by liposuction and then inject an extract of it into various parts of the body like knees or the spinal cord, on the theory that the extract contains stem cells that can provide replacement cells that will repair the damage from injury or illness. The New York Times

U.S.: FDA - U.S. experiencing EpiPen shortage

10 May - The Food and Drug Administration has added EpiPens to its list of drug shortages, stating there have been disruptions in supply in parts of the U.S. even though the manufacturer Mylan is still making and distributing the treatment and a generic version. According to NBC News, federal health officials said May 8 that patients should still be able to find the treatment despite shortages. More than 400 patients in 45 states have reported difficulties with filling prescriptions for Mylan NV's allergy devices and other epinephrine auto-injectors since May 2, James Baker, chief executive officer of patient-advocacy group Food Allergy Research & Education, told Bloomberg. Most patients told FARE that they haven’t been able to obtain the allergy devices at all, while others said they had to wait several weeks to acquire one. Occupational Health and Safety

U.S.: In terms of lives lost, police violence ranks high on the list of US public health issues

8 May - Police violence should be considered a public health issue, according to a new study. ... In their report, researchers ... show what many already know to be true: police violence disproportionately impacts young people, and those young people are disproportionately people of color. ... The average death rate due to police violence was 3.5 per million. Black Americans had a death rate of 7.2 per million, well above the rates for Hispanics and whites, at 3.3 and 2.9 per million, respectively. In terms of [years of life lost] police violence accounted for 57,375 and 54,754 in 2015 and 2016, respectively. People of color make up 39% of the US population, but 52% of all YLL in those two years. Quartz
U.S.: Lyme disease is on the rise again. Here's how to prevent it
7 May - ... The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates the actual prevalence of Lyme disease infections is 10 times higher than the number of reported cases. Tick-borne diseases have been "steadily going up every year ... as the diseases expand to new areas around the country," Lyle Peterson of the CDC told reporters in a recent conference call announcing the updated infection estimates. Lyme disease accounts for about 80 percent of the tick-borne illnesses in the U.S. Another factor that can contribute to the underreporting of cases is a lack of effective surveillance and tracking. "People just go to their local doctor to be treated," says Peterson, and the doctor may not report the case to the local or state health department. Or, if the case is reported by the doctor, he says, sometimes "state health departments have a very difficult time keeping up with the sheer number of cases reports." There's another factor at play, too: shortcomings in the way the infection is diagnosed. ... Blood tests to detect Lyme disease rely on a person's immune response, Fiedler explains, and after infection with the bacteria, it takes time — sometimes as long as 10 to 30 days — for the body to mount a measurable response. The blood tests detect Lyme-specific antibodies. If somebody is tested before the immune system has produced enough antibodies, the result will be a false negative. NPR

U.S.: Many Airbnb venues lack basic safety protections, new study suggests
8 May - Many Airbnb venues in the United States fail to provide the critical carbon monoxide and fire safety protections that are legally required of hotels and motels, suggests new research. The analysis ... revealed that while the majority of rental properties—80 percent—were said to contain smoke detectors, only 56 percent were reportedly equipped with carbon monoxide detectors. Even fewer—42 percent of venues—were said to have fire extinguishers, and first-aid kits were reported in just over a third (36 percent) of venues. The researchers say these numbers are troubling, and they point to a lack of national safety standards for peer-to-peer (P2P) hospitality services like Airbnb.

U.S.: Record number of unused pills collected in drug take back day
10 May - A record number of unused, unwanted, or expired prescription medications were collected during the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s 15th National Prescription Drug Take Back Day at close to 6,000 sites across the U.S., the DEA reported. The DEA was able to collect and destroy nearly one million pounds—almost 475 tons—of potentially dangerous prescription medications. Since the fall of 2010, the DEA has collected a total of 9,964,714 pounds of prescription drugs, or 4,982 tons. Occupational Health and Safety
U.S.: Smallpox antiviral - FDA panel gives OK

3 May - SIGA Technologies, Inc. ... announced this week on a favorable outcome of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Antimicrobial Drugs Advisory Committee meeting on oral TPOXX®, a small molecule antiviral treatment for smallpox. The panel, comprised of independent medical experts, voted unanimously, 17 to 0, that the benefits of TPOXX outweigh its risks. ... The FDA has previously announced that its target final action date for the oral TPOXX NDA is August 8, 2018. The U.S. government’s Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) funded the advanced development of oral TPOXX in partnership with SIGA. Additionally, under Project Bioshield, BARDA has acquired two million courses of oral TPOXX and such courses have been delivered to the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). Outbreak News Today

U.S.: The mysterious long-term effects of inhaling smoke from forest fires

7 May - ... Short-term impacts of wildfire smoke inhalation include asthma attacks, inflammation, and cardiovascular and neurological issues. ... While the short-term health impacts are alarming, they are, at least, easily studied. On the other hand, physicians know almost nothing about the chronic and long-term effects of such events. It’s possible that smoke inhalation could contribute to health problems including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, vision problems, and chronic asthma, but academic studies on the topic are in short supply. Montana is far from the only state dealing with this new smoky reality. California also faced its worst wildfire season on record in 2017, with more than a million acres going up in flames. ... Still, there are significant barriers to understanding how these smoky summers may affect communities down the line. It can be difficult to track one community for an extended period, Noonan says, and the lack of available data in the U.S. is another limiting factor. Pacific Standard

USPACOM

Australia: The dangerous ancient virus that is ‘off the charts’ in Australia

8 May - An ancient virus infecting residents across Australia’s Northern Territory is leaving death and despair in its path, and doctors are now calling for greater efforts to stop the spread of infections. The rates of human T-cell leukemia virus type 1, or HTLV-1, infection are exceeding 40% among adults in remote regions of central Australia, with indigenous communities being the hardest hit, especially in the town of Alice Springs. Many doctors — including the man who discovered the virus nearly four decades ago — are raising the
alarm about how little has been done to prevent, test for and treat HTLV-1, which can cause leukemia and lymphoma. ... HTLV-1 — an ancient virus whose DNA can be found in 1,500-year-old Andean mummies — can spread from mother to child, particularly through breastfeeding; between sexual partners, through unprotected sex; and by blood contact, such as through transfusions. Q13 Fox

Japan Victims of Japan's forced sterilizations demand justice after decades of silence

8 May - ... Surgery was part of a [Japanese] government program to prevent the birth of so-called "inferior descendants" that saw tens of thousands sterilized, often without their consent, under a law not revoked until 1996. Most were physically or cognitively disabled. But others suffered from leprosy, ... mental illness or simply had behavioral problems. ... Now the victims, many of whom were in their teens or younger when they were sterilized, are fighting back, demanding justice from a government they say violated their human rights. ... All could embarrass the government, which insists the surgeries were done legally, and Japan, where attitudes about the disabled still lag other advanced nations even as it prepares to host the Paralympic Games in 2020. Reuters

U.S.: Satellite photos show Hawaii volcano leaking lava, toxic gas

8 May - New photos taken by a NASA satellite offer a unique perspective on the continuing eruption of Hawaii's Kilauea volcano, which since Thursday has destroyed dozens of homes and forced some 1,800 residents to flee the area. Taken on Sunday by an instrument aboard the space agency's Terra satellite, the two false-color photos show fissures along the volcano's East Rift Zone that are leaking lava and the toxic gas sulfur dioxide. The fissures look yellow in the first photo (above), with red representing vegetation and black and gray areas showing old lava flows. In the second photo, long plumes of sulfur dioxide — a colorless but foul-smelling gas that can irritate the skin and mucous membranes — show up as yellow and green streaks. NBC News

Brazil: Brazil reports more yellow fever cases and deaths

10 May - Brazil's health ministry yesterday reported four more lab-confirmed yellow fever cases, along with 15 more deaths, according to its weekly update. The ministry said health
officials are still working through the process of confirming or ruling out a backlog of suspected cases. The country has now reported 1,261 cases and 409 deaths from the disease, for a case-fatality rate of 32.4%. Most of the confirmed cases have been reported from the southeast region of Brazil. The current outbreak is the country's biggest in decades and triggered a nationwide immunization program with full and fractioned doses of the yellow fever vaccine. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

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**Peru: Guillain-Barré syndrome cases investigated in Trujillo**

7 May - The Peru Ministry of Health announced (computer translated) an investigation into a cluster of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) in the city of Trujillo in the La Libertad Region in the northwestern part of the country. Eight cases of an acute neurological syndrome compatible with the Guillain-Barré syndrome has been reported between April 21 and May 1 at the Bethlehem Hospital in the city of Trujillo, three of them are in care intensive with assisted breathing. ... A team made up of experts from the National Center for Epidemiology, Prevention and Control of Diseases (CDC-Peru), the National Institute of Health (INS) and the National Institute of Neurological Sciences (INCN) of the Ministry of Health have been dispatched to Trujillo to carry out the epidemiological investigation. Outbreak News Today

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**The Americas: Americas countries refocus goals in Chagas disease battle**

8 May - Health officials from countries in the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Americas region met in Washington, DC, last week to weigh the status of the battle against Chagas disease, agreeing to focus on maintaining progress and preventing maternal-child transmission, according to a news release yesterday from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). ... According to PAHO, 17 of 21 affected countries in the Americas have interrupted Chagas disease transmission, and all are screening for the parasite in blood banks. However ... around 6 million people still live with the disease and are unaware of their status. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

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