12 May 2017

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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**Fact Sheet: 2017 Eclipse of the Sun**

On 21 August 2017, the skies of North America will darken as a result of a total solar eclipse. Its startling onset and eerie appearance combine to create a unique visual impression. The last total solar eclipse, where the moon almost completely covers the Sun, that was visible in the continental United States occurred in 1979.

If you want to view the solar eclipse in 2017, be aware that staring at the Sun during an eclipse may cause eye injuries, such as permanent blurry vision and central blind spots.

This Fact Sheet provides information about how to safely observe this inspiring event using protective devices designed for eclipse viewing or indirect viewing techniques to prevent eye injuries.

**U.S. MILITARY**

Absolute and relative morbidity burdens attributable to various illnesses and injuries, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2016

April 2017 - ... This annual summary uses a standard disease classification system (modified for use among U.S. military members) and several healthcare burden measures to quantify the impacts of various illnesses and injuries among members of the U.S. Armed Forces in 2016. ... In 2016, more service members (n=550,213) received medical care for injury/poisoning than any other morbidity-related category. In addition, injury/poisoning accounted for more medical encounters (n=2,755,387) than any other morbidity category and approximately one-quarter (24.8%) of all medical encounters overall. Mental disorders accounted for more hospital bed days (n=154,853) than any other morbidity category and 43.8% of all hospital bed days overall. Together, injury/poisoning and mental disorders accounted for more than half (56.2%) of all hospital bed days and more than two-fifths (41.8%) of all medical encounters. Of note, maternal conditions (including pregnancy complications and delivery) accounted for a relatively large proportion of all hospital bed days (n=54,856; 15.5%) but a much smaller proportion of medical encounters overall.

**Medical Surveillance Monthly Report**

A shot against post-traumatic stress disorder

9 May - Each night before “Greg” goes to bed he ... tips five drops of a light-amber, oily liquid onto a spoon. The brew, glistening from the light of the bathroom fixture, is tasteless and has no odor he can detect. But it’s chock-full of bacteria. He sloshes the substance around in his mouth and swallows. Greg hopes that while he sleeps the foreign microbes will wage war with other organisms in his gut, changing that environment to ultimately help him manage some of [his] post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. ... The bacteria he is swallowing, his doctors tell him, “may help reduce symptoms of stress.” Each drop of Greg’s brew is filled with millions of *Lactobacillus reuteri*, a bacterium isolated and derived from human breast milk. The Denver VA Hospital orders the substance and prescribes it as part of a PTSD clinical trial involving 40 veterans who either receive the bacteria or a placebo mix of sunflower oil and other inactive substances. **Scientific American**
Female cadets testify about being sexually assaulted at their service academies

2 May - ... [Annie] Kendzior alleged that Adm. Robert Clark, then-Commandant U.S. Naval Academy, told her to “grow up” when she requested to be moved away from her company, where she said she was raped twice by fellow classmates. ... The three service academies -- West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Air Force Academy -- are required by law to report annually the number of sexual assault incidents occurring on their campuses. According to statistics from the most recent 2015-16 academic year, which were released in March by the Department of Defense, the number of reports had dropped to 86 in the 2015-16 academic year from 91 reports in 2014-15. However, the percent of cadets experiencing unwanted sexual contact rose to 12 percent among women, up from 8 percent the previous year. Also, 1.7 percent of men reported unwanted sexual contact, an increase from the 1.1 percent in the previous report. Stars & Stripes

Lead dust from firearms can pose a silent health risk

10 May - Firearms safety is key for people who use weapons at work or for recreational shooting. But one risk has been little acknowledged: Lead dust exposure. ... If a gun range isn’t ventilated well, lead dust collects on shooters’ clothing and hands and lingers in the air, where it can be inhaled. ... It becomes an occupational hazard for weapons instructors, police and defense personnel. ... In order to reduce risk, the Department of Defense has lowered its blood lead standard to 20 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood, three times more restrictive than its previous standard, which relied on Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines. ... The DoD’s new blood lead policy, in effect as of April, comes after a National Academy of Sciences report published in 2012 showing that defense personnel face significant health risks from lead from firing ranges, defense department spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel James Brindle told NPR. “DoD’s subject matter experts in toxicology and occupational medicine used the Committee's report to propose the lower allowable blood lead level.” NPR

Slow start to processing claims from Lejeune victims

6 May - The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has started making payments in its first program granting disability compensation to veterans with injuries sustained somewhere other than combat. ... From 1953 to 1987, as many as 1 million people were exposed to contaminated water at Jacksonville’s sprawling Camp Lejeune. In March, the VA began reviewing claims for veterans with at least one of eight of the contamination’s hallmark conditions -- including bladder cancer, kidney cancer, leukemia and Parkinson's disease, among others. As of April 18, according to the VA, veterans had made 9,314 claims for Lejeune water contamination -- 3,180 of which included at least one of the presumptive claims. Between March 14 and April 18, the VA had completed reviews of 308 of those claims for a presumptive condition, approving awards for 182 of them and denying the remaining 126. JD News.com
Study finds worsening outcomes in service members five years after mild blast-induced concussion

10 May - According to a new study in JAMA Neurology, U.S. military service members who endured a mild concussion after blast injury while deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan may continue to experience mental health symptoms as well as decreases in quality of life for at least five years after their injury. ... Dr. Mac Donald’s team studied five-year outcomes in 50 service members who experienced mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) in Iraq or Afghanistan and compared the findings to 44 controls who were deployed but not injured. ... The service members underwent a battery of neurological and neuropsychological assessments as well as tests of their overall functional ability to return to work and live independently. The study also showed that a combination of factors, including neurobehavioral symptom severity, walking ability, and verbal fluency at one year after injury, was highly predictive of poor outcomes five years later. ... Dr. Mac Donald’s group also found that while 80 percent of service members with concussions had sought treatment from mental health providers, only 19 percent reported that those programs were helpful. NIH

The U.S. military has a new technology to finally solve the concussion crisis

4 May – ... [R]esearchers are working on advancing new technology that can accurately measure blast strength, and whether or not it causes an [mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI)]. ... Timothy Bentley, and his team at the Office of Naval Research's Warfighter Performance Department in Arlington, Virginia, have engineered new sensor technology that could give medics on the battlefield a clearer idea of whether or not an injury actually occurred after a blast. The coin-sized sensors, placed in service members’ helmets and tactical gear, detect the impact of a blast wave—which moves faster than the speed of sound—and assign it a number, a measure of blast strength. The number is then run through an algorithm that computes how a service member was hit by a blast, which sensors were activated based on their placement, and then tells medics if the service member needs to get off the field immediately or not. If the algorithm shows a possible mTBI, medics in the field have the service member hold a mouse-sized tool—nicknamed the “brain gauge”—that stimulates the fingertips through eraser-sized vibrators. The brain gauge vibrates each finger for a different length of time—if a service member can’t recognize which vibrations last longer, it’s highly likely he or she has suffered an mTBI. Defense One

VA, DOE partner on healthcare big data initiative

5 May - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) have launched a new partnership focused on combining the VA’s healthcare and genomic data with the DOE’s technologies in big data, artificial intelligence and machine learning to identify trends to support the development of new treatments and preventative strategies. According to a press release from the VA, the big data initiative will focus on the analysis of large digital health and genomic data from the VA and other federal sources to help
advance health care for Veterans and others in areas such as suicide prevention, cancer and heart disease, while also focusing on driving DOE’s next-generation supercomputing designs. **Healthcare Informatics**

**VA will look at military's health records system, but won't commit**

3 May - Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin said he is open to adopting the new military electronic health record system for his department but stopped short of promising that will happen this summer. ... The comments came in response to criticism from lawmakers related to the ongoing health records saga, a point of tension for the departments for decades. ... At issue is the seamless medical transition of active-duty troops and reservists to VA care. Veterans have long lamented missing records, repeated exams and frustrating inefficiencies with the dueling department systems. **Military Times**

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**GLOBAL**

Dengue candidate vaccine does well in people exposed to flaviviruses

9 May - A new study of the live-attenuated tetravalent (four-strain) dengue vaccine TV003 shows that the vaccine was safe and immunogenic in healthy adults who had prior flavivirus exposure. ... The subjects were given two doses of TV003, spaced 6 months apart, and then evaluated their rates of seroconversion, tetravalent response, and mean neutralizing antibody titer. TV003 vaccination led to 89% seroconversion against all four strains of dengue virus in the study subjects. **CIDRAP**

Don't screen for thyroid cancer, task force says

9 May – [T]he U.S. Preventive Services Task Force ... puts thyroid cancer screening in its don't-do-it category, in recommendations published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on Tuesday. "The harms outweigh the benefits," task force member Dr. Seth Landefeld says. "We would recommend against screening for thyroid cancer in adults who have no symptoms." ... Screening for cancer would seem to be an obvious way to save lives, and often it is, but in this case screening efforts actually backfire, the task force concluded. The screening process almost always detects cancers that would never grow into life-threatening tumors. ... About 15 years ago, doctors [in South Korea] started a mass campaign to screen for thyroid cancer. That vastly increased the rate of thyroid cancer, to the point that it exceeded cases of breast cancer and other common malignancies. Yet Welch notes that the mortality rate from this cancer didn't change at all. "So all these extra
Drug resistant TB is predicted to steadily spread in 4 countries

9 May - Drug resistant tuberculosis is expected to increase globally over the next two decades. New research predicts a steady rise in TB cases that can’t be cured with conventional, first-line antibiotics in four countries. Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention forecast that these complicated — and potentially deadly — cases of TB will become far more common in Russia, India, the Philippines and South Africa by the year 2040. "Multi-drug resistant TB is going to increase to about 30 percent of cases in Russia," says Peter Cegielski with the CDC's Global TB Branch and the senior author of the new report. "It [drug resistant TB] will get to about 10 percent in India and the Philippines and probably about 5 percent in South Africa." NPR

MERS study indicates mild cases might be missed

10 May - A new analysis of blood samples from people sickened in South Korea's MERS-CoV outbreak showed variable antibody response, including undetectable antibodies in mild cases, which might complicate seroprevalence studies and convalescent serum treatment. CIDRAP

Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for use of cholera vaccine

12 May - ... CVD 103-HgR is recommended for adult travelers (aged 18–64 years) from the United States to an area of active cholera transmission. An area of active cholera transmission is defined as a province, state, or other administrative subdivision within a country with endemic or epidemic cholera caused by toxigenic V. cholerae O1 and includes areas with cholera activity within the last year that are prone to recurrence of cholera epidemics; it does not include areas where only rare imported or sporadic cases have been reported. The vaccine is not routinely recommended for travelers who are not visiting areas of active cholera transmission. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

Study finds race, male sex associated with MRSA bacteremia

10 May - A multicenter study of patients with MRSA bloodstream infections caused by a community-associated strain of the pathogen has identified race as a primary association, researchers reported. ... For the study, researchers retrospectively evaluated hospital-onset methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (HO-MRSA) and hospital-onset methicillin-susceptible S aureus (HO-MSSA) bloodstream infections diagnosed at a large public hospital and a large academic medical center in Chicago. ... [M]ultivariate analysis showed that male sex, African-American race, and non-Hispanic white race/ethnicity were significantly
associated with HO-MRSA bacteremia, while Hispanic ethnicity was negatively associated. Analysis of [whole-genome sequencing] data from a sample of the USA300 MRSA bacteremia isolates further revealed that African-American race was the only factor associated with phylogenic clustering of patient isolates, and that there is an intermixing of USA300 transmission networks between the community and the hospital.

**CIDRAP News Scan (first item)**

**There are disease hidden in ice, and they are waking up**

4 May - ... Climate change is melting permafrost soils that have been frozen for thousands of years, and as the soils melt they are releasing ancient viruses and bacteria that, having lain dormant, are springing back to life. ... Frozen permafrost soil is the perfect place for bacteria to remain alive for very long periods of time, perhaps as long as a million years. ... As the ice and permafrost melt, other infectious agents may be released. ... For instance, scientists have discovered fragments of RNA from the 1918 Spanish flu virus in corpses buried in mass graves in Alaska's tundra. Smallpox and the bubonic plague are also likely buried in Siberia. BBC Earth

**ZIKA VIRUS**

**Prolonged IgM antibody response in people infected with Zika virus: Implications for interpreting serologic testing results for pregnant women**

5 May - ... For asymptomatic pregnant women living in or frequently traveling to areas with Zika virus transmission, Zika virus nucleic acid test (NAT) testing at least once per trimester should be considered, in addition to IgM testing as previously recommended. If positive, this may provide a more definitive diagnosis of recent Zika infection. However, a negative NAT does not rule out recent infection because viral ribonucleic acid (RNA) declines over time. Other diagnostic methods, such as NAT testing of amniocentesis specimens or serial ultrasounds, may provide additional information to help determine whether the IgM test results suggest a recent infection. Providers should counsel women on the limitations of all tests. In addition, providers may wish to consider IgM testing as part of pre-conception counseling to establish baseline IgM results before pregnancy; however, preconception negative IgM results might have limited value for women at ongoing risk of Zika infection. NAT testing should be performed for any pregnant woman who becomes symptomatic or who has a sexual partner who tests positive for Zika virus infection. CDC

**VLP Zika vaccine successful in preclinical study**

10 May - A novel virus-like particle (VLP) Zika vaccine elicited high titers of virus-neutralizing antibodies in mice, according to the vaccine's manufacturer, TechnoVax. ... “The ZIKA VLP vaccine offers an effective and safe strategy to create a prophylactic vaccine that protects against Zika infection, as well as its serious effects such as microcephaly,” said Jose M. Galarza, MD, TechnoVax chief executive officer said in a press release from the company.
Though VLPs are identical to a virus, they lack the genetic ability to replicate. And because vaccines made with VLPs do not require attenuating a virus, they are touted for their safety profiles and immunogenicity. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

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INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 17:
- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal for the majority of the U.S.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity was minimal across EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal across PACOM except for the ROK, which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity was minimal for locations with available data in CENTCOM and AFRICOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity was minimal in Honduras this week based on DMSS data. DHA - Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 29 April 2017 (Week 17):
Surveillance of DoD and civilian populations indicates a continued decrease in influenza activity and in the number of respiratory specimens tested. Influenza B continues, for the fifth week, to have more positive specimens than influenza A in both populations.
- ILI Activity: Army ILI (influenza-like illness) outpatient visits in week 17 were 3% lower than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Two hospitalized influenza-associated cases were reported to APHC through DRSi in week 17: an Active Duty (AD) Service Member (SM) and a non-AD beneficiary.
- Viral specimens: During week 17, 142 of 831 (17%) lab specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. Of 35 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-A reported 18 (51.4%), followed by RHC-C that reported 10 (28.6%), RHC-P that reported 6 (17.1%), and RHC-E that reported 1 (2.9%). CENTCOM did not report any positive influenza A specimens. APHC

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

During week 17 (April 23-29, 2017), influenza activity decreased in the United States.
- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 17 was influenza B. The percentage of
respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories decreased.

- **Novel Influenza A Virus** One human infection with a novel influenza A virus was reported.
- **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.
- **Deaths:** Ten influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported, seven that occurred during the 2016-2017 season and three that occurred during the 2015-2016 season. **CDC**

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

9 May - On 30 April 2017, the National Health and Family Planning Commission of China (NHFPC) notified WHO of 18 additional laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus in mainland China. ... Of these 18 cases, eight were female. The median age was 58 years old (age range among the cases is 4 to 74 years old). ... At the time of notification, there were three deaths, 14 cases were diagnosed as having either pneumonia (4) or severe pneumonia (10), and one case was diagnosed as mild. Seventeen cases were reported to have had exposure to poultry or live poultry market. One was reported to have had no known poultry exposure. To date, a total of 1439 laboratory-confirmed human infections with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus have been reported through IHR notification since early 2013. **WHO**

**ECDC: Flu News Europe**

Week 17/2017 (24 – 30 April 2017).

- Influenza activity across the region decreased further and all 40 reporting countries reported low influenza activity.
- The overall proportion of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza viruses returned to the epidemic threshold value (10%).
- Type B viruses represented 95% of sentinel detections. However, the overall number of type B virus detections remained low. **European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO**

**NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update**

For 2017 Week 17 (through 29 April 2017):

- **Influenza:** Four cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees. The new cases presented for care 15 March – 12 April. One case had been vaccinated > 14 days prior.
- **FRI surveillance** at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at NRTC Great Lakes **Naval Health Research Center**
USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During 16 - 29 April 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 16 & 17), a total of 126 specimens were collected and received from 35 locations. Results were finalized for 109 specimens from 34 locations. During Week 16, five influenza A(H3N2) and 17 influenza B viruses were identified. During Week 17, three influenza A(H3N2) and six influenza B viruses were identified. Approximately 29% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 16. Approximately 20% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 17. The influenza percent positive for the season is currently 36%.

US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Aunt Jemima frozen pancakes, waffles and French toast recalled

8 May - Pinnacle Foods Inc. is voluntarily recalling all “Best By” dates of Aunt Jemima frozen pancakes, frozen waffles and frozen French toast over fears of listeria contamination. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website, the company issued the recall Friday as a precautionary measure for products distributed in the United States and Mexico. The recall does not include Aunt Jemima dry mixes and syrups, the announcement said. The recall was issued after testing indicated the presence of Listeria monocytogenes in the plant environment. Fox News

Lyme disease in dogs: Forecast map created

11 May - As the rate of Lyme disease grows rapidly across the United States, new research offers veterinarians a forecasting map that tells them which parts of the country are most at risk of Lyme disease infections in dogs, which could also help track and predict Lyme disease in people. The forecast map ... shows the predicted Lyme disease prevalence—the percentage of dogs who are likely to test positive—by county in each of the 48 contiguous states. It draws on monthly test data from veterinarians, providing the most timely picture of Lyme disease cases available. Outbreak News Today

Poisoned in paradise: Rat lungworm nightmare in Hawaii

11 May - Whether state officials have downplayed the danger of rat lungworm parasites, the fact remains that Hawaii is in the midst of an outbreak that has given at least three people
from the mainland lasting impressions of the island state. ... The mainlanders ... are among at least 14 confirmed victims of the painful illness. People are exposed to the parasite by eating or drinking contaminated foods and beverages including raw or uncooked snails, slugs, frogs, some seafoods, fresh produce, certain homemade beverages and water from catchment systems. The Hawaii Department of Health reports there are at least another four probable cases of infection. ... The legislature decided in recent days to give $1 million in funding to the Department of Health (DOH). The allocation is contingent on full budget approval. The department has not yet decided how to spend the $1 million, which is split over two fiscal years. Food Safety News

Tests confirm tularemia in Southern Hemisphere animals

10 May - Researchers from Australia yesterday reported the first confirmation of Francisella in Southern Hemisphere animals. Ringtail possums that had been suspected as the source of isolated human infections in Australia tested positive for the bacterium, which causes tularemia. ... As part of efforts to explore undiagnosed diseases in Australian wildlife, the investigators probed possible infectious causes of ringtail possum deaths that involved acute necrotizing enteritis or hepatitis. They included eight possums that were found dead in Sydney from 2000 to 2009. In analyzing RNA from liver samples, the researchers didn’t find any viral or fungal pathogens, but F tularensis was abundant. Sequencing tests suggested F tularensis holarctica. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

WELLNESS

Another study links red meat to early death

10 May - Intake of both processed and unprocessed red meat was associated with all-cause and cause-specific mortality, in part due to heme iron and nitrate or nitrite, reported researchers. In a large U.S. cohort of more than 500,00 people, red meat intake was associated with increased risk of all-cause mortality during the median 15.6 years of follow-up, with a similar impact for unprocessed and processed red meat at the same level of intake, [researchers] reported in The BMJ. The risk was higher too for death due to all the specific causes looked at -- cancer, diseases of the heart, stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases, respiratory disease, diabetes mellitus, infections, kidney disease, and chronic liver disease -- except Alzheimer’s disease. Heme iron and particularly nitrate or nitrite added in processing appeared to drive the associations with processed red meat, mediating 20.9% to 24.1% and 37.0% to 72.0%, respectively, of the increased mortality risks. ... The researchers also found that replacing red meat with white meat, particularly unprocessed white meat, was associated with reduced mortality risk. This was seen even without changing total meat
Fresh food by prescription: This health care firm is trimming costs – and waistlines

8 May - ... Over the last year ... about 180 patients with Type 2 diabetes have been participating in a pilot program aimed at getting them to change their diets and lose weight. They receive free groceries of healthy foods every week. ... The Geisinger Fresh Food Pharmacy is stocked with healthy pantry staples, like oatmeal and peanut butter, as well as fresh produce. ... The participants meet one-on-one with a registered dietitian. They’re given recipes and hands-on instruction on how to prepare healthy meals. ... Over the course of a year, the company will spend about $1,000 on each Fresh Food Pharmacy patient. ... Feinberg says as his team tracks hemoglobin A1C levels in the pilot participants, they’re also assessing the number of medical visits, sicknesses and the overall cost of caring for these patients. It’s still early days, and they plan to fully analyze their first year of data. But here’s what they estimate so far: "A decrease in hemoglobin A1C of one point saves us [about] $8,000," Feinberg says. NPR

HIV life expectancy 'near normal' thanks to new drugs

11 May - Young people on the latest HIV drugs now have near-normal life expectancy because of improvements in treatments, a study in The Lancet suggests. Twenty-year-olds who started antiretroviral therapy in 2010 are projected to live 10 years longer than those first using it in 1996, it found. Doctors say that starting treatment early is crucial to achieve a long and healthy life. ... The study authors, from the University of Bristol, said the extraordinary success of HIV treatments was a result of newer drugs having fewer side effects and being better at preventing the virus from replicating in the body. It is also more difficult for the virus to build up a resistance to the most recent drugs. BBC News

Pain relievers tied to immediate heart risks

9 May - The pain relievers known as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or Nsaints, are known to carry heart risks. A new analysis found that those risks can arise within a week of starting the drugs. Researchers did a systematic review of studies involving more than 446,000 people ages 40 to 79, of whom more than 61,000 had heart attacks. In those who used Nsaints one to seven days, the risk of heart attack increased 24 percent forcelecoxib (Celebrex), 48 percent for ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), 50 percent for diclofenac (Voltaren), and 53 percent for naproxen (Aleve). The increase for rofecoxib (Vioxx), which was taken off the market in 2004 because of its cardiovascular risks, was 58 percent. The study, in BMJ, found that the risk increases with higher doses and duration of treatment, but there was no significant increase in risk after one month of taking the drugs. The New York Times
Price of 'exciting' self-injectable contraceptive cut

9 May - The price of an innovative device which allows women to give themselves a contraceptive jab has been cut. Sayana Press has mostly been used by women in developing countries, as part of a global push to expand access to modern contraception. Working in collaboration with donor organisations has enabled the drug company Pfizer to drop the price from $1 a unit to $0.85 per dose. … Sayana Press dispenses with the need for a conventional needle and syringe - so it has been seen as a significant development for women living in rural parts of Africa. The long-acting progesterone-based contraceptive, which provides contraceptive cover for three months at a time, is licensed for use by the NHS in the UK - but Pfizer admits that uptake here has been "modest". The pre-packaged, single-use jab is now thought to have reached more than 1.5m women in countries such as Uganda and Burkina Faso. BBC News

Teen drinking rates continue to decline

11 May - Alcohol consumption and binge drinking has declined among teens in recent decades, but high school students who do drink alcohol often drink a lot, the CDC reports. One in three teens participating in the 2015 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) reported drinking alcohol in the last 30 days, and one in six reported binge drinking, meaning that they consumed at least five drinks on one or more days. More than half (57.8%) of the high school students who drank alcohol reported recent binge-drinking, and close to 44% of binge drinkers reported consuming eight or more alcoholic beverages during a single drinking session, CDC researcher Marissa Esser, PhD, and colleagues, wrote. MedPage Today

Why everything we know about salt may be wrong

8 May - The salt equation taught to doctors for more than 200 years is not hard to understand. The body relies on this essential mineral for a variety of functions, including blood pressure and the transmission of nerve impulses. Sodium levels in the blood must be carefully maintained. If you eat a lot of salt — sodium chloride — you will become thirsty and drink water, diluting your blood enough to maintain the proper concentration of sodium. Ultimately you will excrete much of the excess salt and water in urine. The theory is intuitive and simple. And it may be completely wrong. New studies of Russian cosmonauts, held in isolation to simulate space travel, show that eating more salt made them less thirsty but somehow hungrier. Subsequent experiments found that mice burned more calories when they got more salt, eating 25 percent more just to maintain their weight. The research … contradicts much of the conventional wisdom about how the body handles salt and suggests that high levels may play a role in weight loss. The New York Times
Liberia: Mystery illness in Liberia appears to be meningitis – minister

9 May - Medical samples from four of the victims of a disease in Liberia that initially baffled scientists have tested positive for a type of bacteria that causes meningitis, the minister of health said on Monday. So far a total of 31 cases of the so-called mystery illness have been reported, including 13 deaths in an outbreak linked to the attendance of a religious leader’s funeral. … Seven specimens from the deceased tested positive for Neisseria meningitidis, a particularly contagious strain of bacteria that causes meningitis and other diseases, Dr. Bernice Dahn told reporters on Monday. … She said the government was investigating options for mass vaccinations against the illness, characterized by swelling of the membranes in the brain and spinal cord. Further laboratory analysis is under way. Reuters

Libya: 245 feared dead in Mediterranean shipwrecks

9 May - The U.N. Refugee Agency says up to 245 migrants are missing and feared dead following shipwrecks in the Mediterranean over weekend. UNHCR said its partner agency the International Medical Corps reported a shipwreck Sunday off the coast of Libya in which 163 people are missing and feared dead. One woman and six men from the ship were rescued by the Libyan Coast Guard, it said. Eighty-two people were reported missing and feared dead Friday when a rubber dinghy sank in the Mediterranean several hours after leaving Libya. … UNHCR said Tuesday more than 1,300 people have lost their lives this year trying to cross the Mediterranean. VOA

Pakistan: Chikungunya in Karachi - WHO recommends ‘radical measures’

7 May - In a follow-up on the chikungunya outbreak in Karachi, Pakistan, the outbreak tally has risen to some 2,076 ‘suspected’ cases of chikungunya in the city, according to Sindh health ministry officials. The outbreak prompted a 9-member World Health Organization (WHO) team to visit Karachi last week to provide support for the Sindh health officials. It is reported that the WHO team recommended “radical measures” to battle the outbreak; however, specifics have not been released to date. Some basic recommendations agreed upon include effective and integrated vector control and improving environmental conditions. Outbreak News Today
Pakistan: More than 22,000 leishmaniasis cases reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 2014

7 May - A leishmaniasis outbreak in Pakistan’s northwestern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prompted a World Health Organization (WHO) workshop last month in Peshawar to instruct on the diagnosis, treatment and management of leishmaniasis. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has reported 22,112 cases of leishmaniasis since Jan. 2014. WHO [imported] 50,000 doses of Glucantime medicine from France for the treatment of leishmaniasis in Pakistan. Acting WHO Representative in Pakistan noted that as Glucantime was an expensive medicine, a more sustainable solution needed to be found, and suggested that the medicine be registered with the Drug Authority of Pakistan. Outbreak News Today

Pakistan: Pakistan chickenpox update - two additional deaths reported in Faisalabad

7 May - In a follow-up on the chickenpox outbreak in Faisalabad, Pakistan, Punjab health officials told the Express Tribune that over 300 cases of chickenpox have been reported in the last four months mostly among adults, and the disease has claimed 18 lives in Faisalabad and its adjoining districts. The official, speaking on the condition of anonymity said people do not get vaccinated against chickenpox as it is costly. Reports of chickenpox vaccine shortages also plague the region. Outbreak News Today

Yemen: Yemen cholera outbreak kills 25 people in a week

8 May - A cholera outbreak in Yemen killed 25 people this week, the World Health Organization said, as two years of war continues to wreak havoc on the impoverished country’s health and sanitation system. The deaths from the diarrheal disease which is carried in food and water tainted by human faeces are among 1,360 cases that the United Nations agency reported since April 27. Reuters

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Belgium: Increasing proportion of carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae and emergence of a MCR-1 producer through a multicentric study among hospital-based and private laboratories in Belgium

11 May - Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (CPE) strains have been increasingly reported in Belgium. We aimed to determine the proportion of CPE among Enterobacteriaceae isolated from hospitalised patients and community outpatients in
Belgium in 2015. From September to November 2015, we found a proportion of clinical CPE of 0.55% (26/4,705) and of 0.60% (12/1,991) among hospitalised patients and among ambulatory outpatients respectively. *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (26/38) and OXA-48-like carbapenemase (28/38) were the predominant species and enzyme among CPE. Compared with the 2012 survey, we found a significant increased proportion of clinical CPE (0.55% in 2015 vs 0.25% in 2012; \( p = 0.02 \)) and an increased proportion of hospitals (13/24 in 2015 vs 8/24 in 2012) with at least one CPE detected. Eurosurveillance


11 May - Invasive group A streptococcal infection has a 15% case fatality rate and a risk of secondary transmission. Twenty-four household pairs were identified. The median onset interval between cases was 2 days (range 0–28) with simultaneous onset in eight pairs. The theoretical number needed to treat to prevent one secondary case using antibiotic prophylaxis was 271 overall, 50 for mother-neonate pairs and 82 for couples aged 75 years and over. While a dramatically increased risk of infection was noted in all household contacts, increased risk was greatest for mother-neonate pairs and couples aged 75 and over, suggesting targeted prophylaxis could be considered. Offering prophylaxis is challenging due to the short time interval between cases emphasising the importance of immediate notification and assessment of contacts. Eurosurveillance

United Kingdom: More than half of UK vapers 'have given up smoking'

8 May - For the first time, more than half of the UK’s electronic-cigarette users have since given up smoking tobacco, a study suggests. Some 1.5 million vapers are ex-smokers, compared with 1.3 million who still use tobacco, a survey of 12,000 adults for Action on Smoking and Health found. But Ash said the message that vaping was much less harmful than smoking had not yet got through to all smokers. Some nine million still smoke in the UK despite a big rise in e-cigarette use. In 2012, there were 700,000 vapers in the UK; now there are 2.9 million. BBC News

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U.S.: Anti-vaccine groups blamed in Minnesota measles outbreak

8 May - A measles outbreak continues to strike Minnesota as health officials stress the importance of getting vaccinated. There are now 48 confirmed measles cases in Hennepin,
Ramsey and Crow Wing counties, mostly affecting unvaccinated Somali-American children, according to data released by the state's Department of Health on Monday. Of those impacted, 46 are children 10 and younger; 41 are Somali-American; and 45 have not been vaccinated against the disease, according to the data. The state's outbreak -- the largest in over two decades -- appears to have started in a Somali community, where vaccine skepticism has recently spread, said Kristen Ehresmann, director of the Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division at the Minnesota Department of Health. [In 2008] parents started to notice a disproportionate number of Somali children receiving special education services for autism in Minneapolis. … “At that point, the anti-vaccine groups just really started targeting the community,” she said. CNN

U.S.: CDC says U.S. adult vaccine coverage up but still wanting

5 May - The use of several key adult vaccines increased slightly in 2015—the year for which the most current data are available—but are still low, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported today. CDC researchers evaluated self-reported immunization statistics from the National Health Interview Survey for recommended adult vaccinations in 2015, and for flu vaccine during the 2014-15 flu season. … They noted that pneumococcal vaccine uptake increased by 2.8 percentage points over the previous year (to 23.0%), tetanus and diphtheria with acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine uptake was up 3.1 percentage points (to 23.1%), herpes zoster vaccine among adults aged 60 years and older increased 2.7 percentage points (to 30.6%), and hepatitis B vaccine use among healthcare workers rose by 4.1 percentage points (to 64.7%). Flu vaccine coverage improved by 1.6 percentage points, to 44.8%. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

U.S.: Deadly 'superbug' fungus emerging in U.S. hospitals

5 May - A deadly "superbug" fungus that is hard to spot and harder to kill is slowly infiltrating U.S. hospitals, health experts say. Candida auris enters the bloodstream, spreads throughout the body and causes a variety of infections, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns. More than 60 cases have been identified in the U.S., all but a few of them in New York and New Jersey. The CDC has alerted hospitals and other health care facilities across the nation to watch out for the relatively new fungus. The fungus can be passed between people or through the environment from such things as hospital equipment, says Dr. Tom Chiller, chief of the CDC’s Mycotic (fungal) Diseases Branch. Some strands of the fungus found in other countries have been resistant to the three classes of anti-fungal medicine, he said. USA TODAY

U.S.: Distracted driving, falls, opioids cause spike in unintentional death rate

10 May - The preventable death rate in the United States is increasing despite an overall improving fatality rate, according to the National Safety Council’s 2017 Injury Facts publication. NSC’s latest Injury Fact report, which is published annually, examined
unintentional injury data from 2015 and the causes and factors that played a role in the 7.7 percent increase in deaths from 2014. ... Three factors played a major role in the nearly 8 percent spike: poisoning, driven by prescription drugs and heroin deaths; slips, trips and falls, which directly correlates to an aging population and motor vehicle deaths due to distracted driving. A reported 146,571 Americans died in 2015 from causes such as drug overdoses, motor vehicle crashes, falls, choking and drowning. Poisoning is the number one cause of unintentional death, according to the report. EHS Today

U.S.: FDA approves first ALS treatment in more than two decades

5 May - The Food and Drug Administration on Friday approved Mitsubishi Tanabe Pharma Corp’s treatment for fatal neurological disorder amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), marking the first such U.S. regulatory approval in more than two decades. ... After six months of treatment with edaravone on top of standard-of-care, data showed the intravenous drug reduced the rate of functional decline in patients by about a third. ... To be sold under the brand name Radicava, the drug should be available in the United States by August, MTPA Chief Commercial Officer Tom Larson said. Radicava would cost $1,086 per infusion, Mitsubishi Tanabe Pharma said on Friday. If taken annually for 12 months or 13 cycles, according to the dosing and administration per the label, the cost before government discount would be $145,524, the company added. Reuters

U.S.: Greater total pollution exposure tied to higher cancer risk

8 May - Living in areas with higher total exposures to harmful pollutants in the air, water and land is associated with greater odds of developing cancer, a U.S. study suggests. While plenty of previous research has linked individual pollutants to increased risks of specific types of cancer, the current study focused on how the combined effect of exposure to a variety of environmental contaminants may influence the risk of tumors. Researchers examined the annual incidence rate for cancer diagnoses for each county in the U.S. and found an average of 451 cases for every 100,000 people. Compared to counties with the highest environmental quality, counties that ranked the lowest had an average of 39 more cancer cases each year for every 100,000 residents. Reuters

U.S.: Hepatitis C in the U.S. - cases triple in past 5 years

11 May - Over just five years, the number of new hepatitis C virus infections reported to CDC has nearly tripled, reaching a 15-year high, according to new preliminary surveillance data released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Because hepatitis C has few symptoms, nearly half of people living with the virus don’t know they are infected and the vast majority of new infections go undiagnosed. Further, limited surveillance resources have led to underreporting, meaning the annual number of hepatitis C virus cases reported to CDC (850 cases in 2010 and 2,436 cases in 2015) does not reflect the true scale of the epidemic. CDC estimates about 34,000 new hepatitis C infections
U.S.: Medicare didn't investigate suspicious reports of hospital infections

9 May - Almost 100 hospitals reported suspicious data on dangerous infections to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services officials, but the agency did not follow up or examine any of the cases in depth, according to a report by the Health and Human Services inspector general's office. Most hospitals report how many infections strike patients during treatment, meaning the infections are likely contracted inside the facility. Each year, Medicare is supposed to review up to 200 cases in which hospitals report suspicious infection-tracking results. The IG said Medicare should have done an in-depth review of 96 hospitals that submitted "aberrant data patterns" in 2013 and 2014. Such patterns could include a rapid change in results, improbably low infection rates or assertions that infections nearly always struck before patients arrived at the hospital. NPR

U.S.: New safety risks detected in one-third of FDA-approved drugs

9 May - Almost a third of drugs cleared by the Food and Drug Administration pose safety risks that are identified only after their approval, according to a study published Tuesday. The researchers said the study, in the Journal of the American Medical Association, shows the need for ongoing monitoring of new treatments years after they hit the market. "We seem to have decided as a society that we want drugs reviewed faster," said lead author Joseph Ross, an associate professor of medicine and public health at Yale University. That makes it critically important "that we have a strong system in place to continually evaluate drugs and to communicate new safety concerns quickly and effectively," he said. To win FDA approval, medications must be shown to be safe and effective. But many pivotal clinical trials used for approval involve fewer than 1,000 patients with follow-up of six months or less, according to the study. Safety problems often crop up years later after therapies have been used by much larger numbers of patients. The Washington Post

U.S.: Scott Gottlieb confirmed to lead Food and Drug Administration

9 May - Scott Gottlieb, President Trump's choice to become the next commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, was confirmed Tuesday by the Senate. The vote was 57 to 42. Gottlieb, a physician and venture capitalist with long ties to the pharmaceutical industry, served as a deputy FDA commissioner and a high-ranking official at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services during the George W. Bush administration. He assumes the agency's helm as it faces mounting pressure from President Trump and other Republicans to further accelerate its drug-approval process and to take a more aggressive role in combating the nation's opioid epidemic. The Washington Post
U.S.: Tunnel collapse renews safety concerns about nuclear sites

10 May - The collapse of a tunnel containing radioactive waste at the Hanford nuclear weapons complex underscored what critics have long been saying: that the toxic remnants of the Cold War are being stored in haphazard and unsafe conditions, and time is running out to deal with the problem. ... At Hanford, in addition to the tunnel collapse discovered on Tuesday, dozens of underground storage tanks, some dating to World War II, are leaking highly radioactive materials. ... Safely removing it now is proving enormously expensive, slow-going, extraordinarily dangerous and so complex that much of the technology required simply does not exist. The cleanup has also been plagued with setbacks both political and technical. For example, the nation's only underground nuclear waste repository, in New Mexico, closed to new shipments in 2014 after an improperly packed drum of waste ruptured. The site just recently reopened. VOA

U.S.: U.S. life expectancy rates differ by more than 20 years between some counties, the largest discrepancy since the 1980s

8 May - Life expectancy is rising overall in the United States, but in some areas, death rates are going conspicuously in the other direction. These geographical disparities are widening, according to a report published Monday in JAMA Internal Medicine. Life expectancy is greatest in the high country of central Colorado, but in many pockets of the United States, life expectancy is more than 20 years lower, according to the report. ... Among the places with sharply increased life expectancy and lower deaths over that period are the District of Columbia and Loudoun County, Va. ... Of the 10 counties where life expectancy has dropped the most since 1980, eight are in Kentucky. The other two are in Oklahoma and Alabama. The Washington Post

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Australia: Australia wins landmark WTO tobacco packaging case – Bloomberg

5 May - A landmark Australian law on restrictive tobacco packaging has been upheld at the World Trade Organization after a five-year legal battle, Bloomberg news reported on Thursday, citing two people familiar with the situation. The news is a blow to the tobacco industry as such a ruling from the WTO has been widely anticipated as giving a green light for other countries to roll out similar laws. It could have wider implications if applied to
packaging for alcohol and junk food. ... The rules, introduced in 2010, ban logos and distinctive-colored cigarette packaging in favor of drab olive packets that look more like military or prison issue, with brand names printed in small standardized fonts. **Reuters**

**Australia: Indigenous people exposed to UK nuclear tests given healthcare aid**

9 May - Indigenous Australians who were exposed to radiation from British nuclear tests will receive upgraded healthcare, the Australian government has announced. From 1952 to 1963, Britain detonated bombs at Maralinga and Emu Field in South Australia, and the Montebello Islands off Western Australia. Although the sites were remote, many Aboriginal people were forced to move. Those who remained were exposed to high levels of radiation, which was later linked to significant health problems. They will now be eligible for a war veterans’ Gold Card, which covers most medical costs, Veterans’ Affairs Minister Dan Tehan said. “The measure will provide Gold Cards to indigenous people present at or near Maralinga, Emu Field or the Montebello Islands at the time of the British nuclear tests in the 1950s or 1960s,” he said. **BBC News**

**India: India schoolgirls ill after New Delhi gas leak**

6 May - At least 200 pupils were admitted to hospital after a gas leak near their school in southern New Delhi, Indian police said. Classes were under way at the government-run girls’ school in Tughlakabad when gas leaked from a container parked at a depot close to the school and filled with a chemical meant for industrial use, officials said. “The children complained of irritation in the eyes and throat and were immediately evacuated and sent to three hospitals nearby,” Romil Baaniya, deputy commissioner of police, told reporters. “No one is serious. The situation is normal now,” he said, adding that more than half of those admitted to hospitals have been released. Police will initiate legal action against the handlers for negligence, Baaniya said. Deputy fire chief Rajesh Panwar said, however, the source of the gas leak remains unclear. ... Gas leaks are not uncommon in India, with most caused by a failure to comply with safety standards. **Al Jazeera**

**Japan: Eating raw meat tied to toxoplasmosis in Japan**

8 May - Toxoplasmosis was uncommon in a study of pregnant women in Japan, but infection occurred most often in a region where people often eat raw meat, researchers reported here. About 2% of pregnant women had a history of *Toxoplasma gondii* infection and one in 1,000 women may be at risk of becoming infected during pregnancy, but no infants in the study tested positive, according to Hiroyuki Moriuchi, MD, of Nagasaki University. Some of the women who contracted *T. gondii* reported gardening or farming, but only one had a pet cat, he said at the Pediatric Academic Societies meeting here. ... Among the 21 women with suspected new infection, 14 (67%) reported eating raw or
under-cooked meat, four (19%) reported gardening or farming, one (5%) worked at a restaurant, and one (5%) had a cat. MedPage Today

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**Haiti: Cholera cases down 60 percent in Haiti**

8 May - The number of cholera cases reported in Haiti through Apr. 8 this year is down significantly compared to the same periods in 2015 and 2016, according to a new report from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). A total of 4,871 suspected cholera cases were reported in Haiti, including 69 deaths to date. This represents a 60 and 61 percent decrease compared to the 12,373 and 12,226 suspected cholera cases reported during the same period in 2015 and 2016, respectively. In addition, the 69 deaths reported in 2017 represents a 41% and 50% decrease compared to the 116 and 139 deaths reported during the same period in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Outbreak News Today

**Venezuela: Infant mortality and malaria soar in Venezuela, according to government data**

9 May - Venezuela’s infant mortality rose 30 percent last year, maternal mortality shot up 65 percent and cases of malaria jumped 76 percent, according to government data, sharp increases reflecting how the country's deep economic crisis has hammered at citizens' health. The statistics, issued on the ministry’s website after nearly two years of data silence from President Nicolas Maduro’s leftist government, also showed a jump in illnesses such as diphtheria and Zika. ... In the health sector, doctors have emigrated in droves and patients have to settle for second-rate treatment or none at all. A leading pharmaceutical association has said roughly 85 percent of medicines are running short. Venezuelans often barter medicine, post pleas on social media, travel to neighboring countries if they can afford it, or line up for hours at pharmacies. Reuters

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