

13 November 2015

# Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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## Foodborne Illness-Causing Organisms Poster

A new Foodborne Illness-Causing Organisms poster with information on foodborne illnesses and how to recognize them is now available for download on the [APHC Health Information Products eCatalog](#).



## U.S. MILITARY

### Many U.S. veterans may face sexual health problems

10 November - Many U.S. veterans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan may encounter sexual health problems, a new study suggests. Almost 18 percent of veterans screened positive for sexual dysfunction in initial visits at the post-deployment clinic at a veterans affairs medical center in Houston, researchers say. It's possible the actual prevalence of sexual dysfunction is much higher, because veterans, like many other people, may be reluctant to discuss sex with providers they are seeing for the first time, noted study co-author Dr. Drew Helmer, director of the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center.

[Reuters](#)

### Military male-on-male sex assault study is retracted

9 November - The American Psychological Association retracted a report that claimed male-on-male sexual assault in the U.S. military may be 15 times higher than previously thought. The research ... said a special survey of 180 Iraq and Afghanistan male combat veterans found the rate of military sexual assault among men to be 17.2 percent, instead of the 1.1 percent reported by traditional anonymous surveys. If accurate, that would mean that as many as 159,000 male service members were sexually assaulted in 2014, as opposed to the estimated 10,600 men reported in a Rand Corp. study published last December. The APA issued a release Sunday saying it retracted the article based on flawed data analysis.

[Military Times](#)

### New law gives federal workers who are veterans medical leave

8 November - President Obama has signed into law a bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. Stephen Lynch aimed at giving federal workers who are also veterans extra time off to seek medical care. The new law provides the employees with 104 hours of what Lynch calls "Wounded Warrior leave" during their first year in the federal workforce so that they can seek medical treatment for service-connected disabilities without being forced to take unpaid leave or forego their appointments.

[Military Times](#)

### Senate approves research into combat effects on mental health

11 November - Research into veterans' suicide received a lift on Tuesday with Senate passage of a measure requiring an independent research program on the effects of combat service on suicide rates and other mental health issues among troops and veterans. ... "We simply don't know enough about the effects of combat on mental health issues among service members and veterans both during and after service," said the amendment's sponsor, Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado.

[The New York Times](#)

### **Bearing Fruit: The Fight for the FDA's Food Safety Reforms**

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act which was signed into law in January 2011, strengthens safety standards for food facilities and fresh produce; improves inspection requirements; helps limit the dangers in food products that come from outside US borders; and provides the FDA with the power to issue a mandatory recall of contaminated food, among other new areas of authority given to the agency. For the first time, the law gave the agency prevention-based tools for protecting the US food supply. The FDA can shut down a potentially dangerous food facility without having to wait for people to become sick first.



## **Senate backs letting VA doctors recommend medical marijuana to vets**

11 November - Legislation passed Tuesday by the Senate includes a provision that would allow VA doctors to recommend medical marijuana to patients in states where it is legal. Some veterans groups have pressed Congress for years to allow the drug for patients suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The so-called Veterans Equal Access Amendment would do so and was sponsored by Sens. Steve Daines, R-Montana, and Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon. In a statement, Daines noted that the provision "does not change current laws preventing the possession or dispensing of marijuana on VA property, but simply allows veterans to discuss all options that are legally available in their state with their VA doctor." [Military.com](#)

## **US military pharmacy fraud case: Federal prosecutors investigate claims of false billing amid sharp increase in prescription drug spending**

9 November - Federal prosecutors have opened investigations in at least four states into compounding pharmacies that allegedly issued false claims to a U.S. military health insurance program. ... In Florida, where four pharmacies previously agreed to pay a total of \$12.8 million in civil settlements that they allegedly falsely billed military insurance program Tricare, the U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Florida, A. Lee Bentley III, said he would pursue "numerous criminal investigations." ... Two of the pharmacies employed people who allegedly paid doctors to write prescriptions for Tricare patients, even if the doctors hadn't met the patients, prosecutors said. Another pharmacy allegedly gave commissions to marketers who promoted their drugs. Some pharmacies charged Tricare from \$10,000 to \$40,000 for a month of compounded medicines.

[International Business Times](#)

## **Why are 10 percent of prisoners on death row veterans, some with PTSD?**

9 November - Noting that some 300 U.S. veterans are sitting on death row in prisons around the country, an advocacy group Tuesday called for greater efforts to assist battle-scarred former troops who are convicted of capital murder after their military service. The report from the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington found that veterans represent about 10% of those convicted of capital murder, roughly the same as their percentage of the overall prison population. Researchers also concluded that judges, prosecutors and even the White House sometimes fail to appreciate the impact that post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental issues can cause for returning veterans. "Capital punishment stands out as a questionable punishment for those who have served in the military," said Richard C. Dieter, the center's senior programs director and formerly its longtime executive director. "Even today, there are veterans on death row with PTSD that

**Warrior Care  
Month:  
Reconditioning**

The Army's Warrior Care Month commemoration continues throughout November, and this week's theme is "Show Your Strength through Reconditioning." Adaptive reconditioning offers activities and sporting competition for wounded, ill and injured Soldiers to optimize their physical, cognitive and emotional well-being and also remain connected to their military community.



was unexplored at their trial or undervalued for its pernicious effects." [Los Angeles Times](#)

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**GLOBAL**

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## AHA joins Google in 5-year plan to cure CVD

8 November - If you think you have "the best idea" about how to cure coronary heart disease -- or better yet prevent it -- there is a \$50 million check with your name on it. ... As outlined, the [American Heart Association (AHA)] and Google Life Sciences will each contribute \$25 million to the research, all of which will be used to fund a single team under a team leader who may or may not be a cardiologist. "Could be a teenager from Wisconsin who has the best idea," said Andy Conrad, CEO of Google Life Sciences. Conrad and Brown said that person with the best idea has not yet been identified, but task of finding him or her is starting immediately, as the partners solicit proposals. Once the leader is identified, he or she will "assemble a cross-functional team of investigators, and lead all efforts towards further funding new causes and drivers of coronary heart disease." [MedPage Today](#)

## Asymptomatic human dengue cases spread virus to mosquitoes

10 November - Researchers ... conducted a study showing that people who have asymptomatic dengue fever transmit the virus to mosquitoes when bitten. These individuals who do not have any clinical symptoms of the virus, as well as mildly symptomatic people, add up to three-quarters of the entire population of dengue fever cases. Currently, there are 390 million people infected with the virus around the world each year. "This finding raises the possibility that people with few or no symptoms -- in other words the majority of those infected by dengue -- may actually be contributing to the spread of the virus without realizing it," Louis Lambrechts, a CNRS scientist in charge of the Insect-Virus Interactions Group at the Institut Pasteur in Paris, said. [Vaccine News](#)

## Atmospheric greenhouse gas levels hit record

10 November - Global concentrations of carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere surpassed 400 parts per million this past spring for the first time, breaching a symbolic barrier set by climate scientists and policy makers, according to a report released Monday. Concentrations of other greenhouse gases produced from human activities, such as methane and nitrous oxide, also reached records in 2014, the World Meteorological Organization announced in its annual Greenhouse Gas Bulletin. The report is one of several measurements made by different climate agencies to address the state of greenhouse gases in advance of the Paris Climate Summit. "This evidence shows us that the concentrations are increasing, and they are increasing with increasing rates," said Oksana Tarasova, chief of the W.M.O.'s

## Classified Version of the Weekly Update

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

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

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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

Atmospheric Environment Research Division.

[The New York Times](#)

## Fecal transplants made (somewhat) more palatable

9 November - ... Mark B. Smith, a young doctoral student in microbiology, ... started a nonprofit called OpenBiome, the first stool bank in the country, which distributes fecal samples from healthy donors to help cure people with tenacious *C. difficile* infections. Now OpenBiome has made the process, called fecal microbiota transplantation, far simpler. The bank has come up with a capsule containing fecal microbes that can be taken much like any other drug — poop in a pill. "It's such an obvious improvement," Dr. Smith said. [The New York Times](#)

## Large study reports results comparing two CPR methods used by EMS providers following sudden cardiac arrest

9 November - In a study published online today in the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers found that cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) administered by emergency medical services (EMS) providers following sudden cardiac arrest that combines chest compressions with interruptions for ventilation resulted in longer survival times and shorter hospital stays than CPR that uses continuous chest compressions. Although compressions with pauses for ventilation lead to more hospital-free days within 30 days of the cardiac arrest, both methods achieved similar overall survival to hospital discharge, the study noted. [NIH](#)

## Maternal mortality falls by almost 50% - UN report

12 November - Pregnancy-related deaths have fallen by almost half in the past 25 years, according to a report by United Nations agencies published in The Lancet. Around 303,000 women died of complications during pregnancy or up to six weeks after giving birth in 2015 - down from 532,000 in 1990. ... However, only nine countries hit targets set by the UN. "This report will show that by the end of 2015 maternal mortality will have dropped by 44% from its levels from 1990," said Dr Lale Say, coordinator for reproductive health and research at the WHO. [BBC News](#)

## Study finds antibody drop-off 5 years after meningococcal vaccine

9 November - High numbers of adults and children vaccinated against meningococcal disease still had robust levels of antibodies to three of the four vaccine strains 5 years after vaccination, but antibody response to the "A" strain was much lower, a study ... found. ... The researchers evaluated antibody persistence in 215 participants aged 10 to 25 years old 1, 3, and 5 years. ... They found that at least 79.5% of the volunteers had antibody titers of 1:8 or greater for the C, W, and Y meningococcal serogroups, but only 37.5% of MenACWY-TT recipients and 44.4% of MenACWY-DT recipients had that level of antibody response for

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the A serogroup. The investigators also found a 5-year booster dose to be well tolerated and immunogenic. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

## Study shows copper surfaces rapidly kill human coronavirus

10 November - Surfaces made of copper and copper alloys can inactivate a human coronavirus within minutes—as opposed to days for other surfaces—showing potential to combat MERS-CoV and other respiratory viruses, University of Southampton researchers reported today in *mBio*. The team studied 229E, a human coronavirus closely related to MERS and SARS viruses that can cause disease ranging from the common cold to pneumonia. [CIDRAP Coronavirus Scan](#) (third item)

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## INFLUENZA

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### AFHSC: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 43:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity was minimal.
- EUCOM: There was minimal influenza activity.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Both show minimal influenza activity.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity remains minimal.

[Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center](#)

### APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 31 October 2015 (Week 43)

Overall activity remains very low in both Army and civilian populations. RHC-A was the only region to report positive influenza A specimens during week 43. No hospitalized influenza cases were reported in week 43.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 43 were 6% lower than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: No hospitalized influenza cases were reported to APHC (P) through DRSi in week 43. Two cases have been reported to date this influenza season.
- Viral specimens: During week 43, 69 of 642 (11%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. (14%). RHC-A was the only region that reported positive influenza-A specimens during week 43. [Army Public Health Center](#)

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

During week 43 (October 25-31, 2015), influenza activity was low in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories in week 43 was influenza A viruses, with influenza A (H3) viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories is low.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below their system-specific epidemic threshold in both the NCHS Mortality Surveillance System and the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System.  
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

## ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 44/2015 (26 October – 1 November)

- Influenza activity in the WHO European Region was at low levels in all 40 countries that reported data for week 44/2015.
- In line with this low activity, influenza viruses were detected in 55 patients only: eight from sentinel influenza-like illness (ILI) sources, 46 from non-sentinel sources and one laboratory-confirmed influenza case in a hospitalized patient.
- Representatives of all seasonal influenza viruses (A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2) and B) were detected.

Season

- As usual for this time of year, influenza activity in the European Region is low, with few influenza viruses detected.
- No indications of increased mortality due to influenza have been reported through the European monitoring of excess mortality for public health action project.  
[European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO](#)

## NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For 2015 Week 44 (through 7 November 2015):

- **Influenza:** No new cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were moderately elevated at Fort Benning.
- There have been recent clusters of *M. pneumoniae* cases at several training centers.  
[Naval Health Research Center](#)

## On top of the flu

9 November - Harvard statisticians have devised a new method to track the flu via Internet search data, potentially providing public health officials and consumers alike with advance warning this flu season. The system adopts an approach — tracking searches for key words and phrases such as “flu,” “flu symptoms,” “treating the flu” ... but combines it with additional data to improve accuracy. The result, according to Samuel Kou, a professor of statistics, is the most precise method yet. ... The approach, called ARGO, for AutoRegression with Google search data, combines Google data with historical records from the CDC and information on seasonality of the flu. It also accounts for changes in the inner workings of Google’s search engine and shifts in search behavior. [Harvard Gazette](#)

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

For 25 October - 7 November 2015 (Surveillance Weeks 43 & 44):

During 25 October - 7 November 2015, a total of 142 specimens were collected and received from 44 locations. Results were finalized for 87 specimens from 34 locations. One influenza B virus was identified during Week 43, and one influenza A(H3N2) was identified in Week 44. [US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

## WHO: Influenza Update

2 November - Globally, influenza activity generally decreased or remained low in both hemispheres, with only a few countries reporting elevated respiratory illness levels.

- In the Northern Hemisphere, influenza activity continued at low, inter-seasonal levels with sporadic detections.
- Few influenza virus detections were reported by countries in Africa.
- In tropical countries of the Americas, Central America and the Caribbean, influenza activity remained at low levels, with the exception of Cuba, where high numbers of severe acute respiratory infections (SARI), associated with influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 virus and RSV, continued to be reported. In Colombia, acute respiratory activity (ARI) remained slightly elevated with ongoing RSV and influenza A(H3N2) detections.
- In western Asia, Bahrain and Qatar reported increased influenza activity, predominantly due to influenza A (H1N1)pdm09.
- In tropical Asia, countries in Southern and South East Asia reported low influenza activity overall except India, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand where activity mainly due to A(H1N1)pdm09 virus in India and A(H3N2) virus in Lao PDR and Thailand continued to be reported. Influenza activity declined in southern China. Iran reported increased influenza detections, mostly due to influenza A(H3N2).
- In temperate South America, respiratory virus activity continued to decrease in recent weeks. In Chile, ILI activity remained above expected levels in recent weeks though

influenza A and RSV detections have decreased.

- In South Africa, the influenza season ended by mid-September with sporadic detections of mostly influenza B viruses in recent weeks.
- In Australia, influenza activity continued to decrease. Recent influenza virus detections were in almost equal proportions of influenza A and B viruses. [WHO](#)

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## **VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY**

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### **Customers head to Chipotle as outlets reopen in Northwest**

11 November - Customers returned to Pacific Northwest Chipotle restaurants on Wednesday as the chain reopened after an *E. coli* outbreak that sickened about 45 people in Washington state and Oregon. ... Chipotle voluntarily closed 43 restaurants in Washington state and Oregon at the end of October after health officials discovered most of the people sickened in an *E. coli* outbreak had one thing in common: a recent meal at Chipotle. The outbreak hospitalized more than a dozen people. Health officials from the two states have not found the source of the outbreak, despite testing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration of food samples from each of the affected restaurants. [The News & Observer](#)

### **New treatment slows an epidemic of sleeping sickness**

9 November - Cases of human sleeping sickness have fallen greatly in parts of rural Uganda where cattle were given an experimental dual treatment that killed both the parasites that cause the disease and the flies that carry them, researchers in Scotland said Monday. ... [It] was clear that the new technique had cut cattle infections, which lead to human ones, by 75 percent. ... In the campaign, 400,000 cattle in seven districts were injected with the anti-parasitic drugs Veridium or Veriben. Their legs and bellies, which flies bite, were sprayed monthly with Vectocid, a long-lasting insecticide. The animals' ears were also sprayed, [which] persuaded reluctant farmers to cooperate, Dr. Welburn said. Because African cattle infected with the parasites do not get sleeping sickness, few farmers would make extra efforts to stamp them out, she said. But the ears are full of ticks, and cattle do die of tick-borne diseases like East Coast fever. Farmers were willing to herd their cows to spray stations to prevent that. [The New York Times](#)

### **PETA sues U.S. government over information about elephants with TB**

6 November - Animal rights activists have sued the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, seeking the release of data about elephants and tuberculosis because of the risk

that the animals could spread the potentially deadly disease to other elephants as well as humans. The lawsuit, filed by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) on Thursday in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, seeks records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) from the HHS's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding TB in elephants. [Reuters](#)

## Veterinary task force wants antibiotic resistance solutions at top of public health agenda

11 November - A national task force report on the growing problem of antibiotic resistance in animal agriculture spotlights the need to make finding solutions a top public health priority, said Willie Reed, dean of the Purdue University College of Veterinary Medicine. Reed serves on the 14-member Task Force on Antibiotic Resistance in Production Agriculture composed of agricultural educators, industry leaders and animal health specialists. In its report released Oct. 29, the task force recommended that a centralized research organization be created to coordinate public and private efforts to curb antibiotic resistance, which the group says "threatens human, animal and environmental health." [Medical Xpress](#)

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### WELLNESS

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## Brain stimulation limits calories consumed in adults with obesity

4 November - A National Institutes of Health study found that non-invasive brain stimulation decreased calorie consumption and increased weight loss in adults who are obese. The findings suggest a possible intervention for obesity, when combined with healthy eating and exercise. ... [Nine] participants ate a weight-maintaining diet for five days. Then for three days, they unknowingly received either active or sham (fake) transcranial direct current stimulation, or tDCS. Participants then ate and drank as much as they wanted from computerized vending machines. Applied to the scalp, the active tDCS targeted the brain region controlling behavior and reward. The four people who got the sham stimulation during both visits consumed the same number of calories from the vending machines on each visit and did not lose weight. But the five people who got inactive stimulation on the first visit, and active tDCS at the brain target on the second visit, consumed an average of 700 fewer calories and lost an average of 0.8 pounds on the second visit. [NIH](#)

## Current cigarette smoking among adults – United States, 2005–2014

13 November - ... The percentage of U.S. adults who smoke cigarettes declined from 20.9% in 2005 to 16.8% in 2014. Among daily cigarette smokers, declines were observed in the percentage who smoked 20–29 cigarettes per day (from 34.9% to 27.4%) or ≥30 cigarettes per day (from 12.7% to 6.9%). In 2014, prevalence of cigarette smoking was higher among males, adults aged 25–44 years, multiracial persons and American Indian/Alaska Natives, persons who have a General Education Development certificate, live below the federal poverty level, live in the Midwest, are insured through Medicaid or are uninsured, have a disability or limitation, or are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

## FDA clears smokeless snus for sale

10 November - Swedish-made "snus," a smokeless tobacco product packaged in individual use portions, will be allowed for sale in the U.S., the FDA announced Tuesday. But for now, at least, they will sport the same warning labels stating that they are "not a safe alternative to cigarettes" currently required for other smokeless tobacco products. The eight snus products are the first to be cleared under the FDA's premarket tobacco application (PMTA) pathway, established after Congress authorized the agency to regulate tobacco products. The manufacturer, Swedish Match North America, presented evidence that snus are, in fact, less toxic than cigarettes and has asked for permission to revise the label warning to read, "No tobacco product is safe, but this product presents substantially lower risks to health than cigarettes." [MedPage Today](#)

## Helping soldiers transcend trauma

9 November - ... Contrary to public opinion, posttraumatic growth is much more common than posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As many as 90 percent of survivors report at least one aspect of posttraumatic growth, such as a renewed appreciation for life, deeper compassion, or an intensified connection to their heart's purpose. This does not happen immediately or easily, and rarely by itself. We need to actively work towards positive change, and we need the right tools and support in order to transform a bad break into a breakthrough. ... [The] Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program in 2009, [shifts] away from a focus on physical fitness to an emphasis on psychological resilience. Every single U.S. soldier participates in the \$160-million program and trains in strategies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, strength of character, and connection. [The Daily Beast](#)

## Here's what happens to your body after you down an energy drink



12 November - ... In an effort to get more information about exactly happens in your body after you consume one of the drinks, Mayo Clinic researcher[s] ... recruited 25 volunteers. All were young adults age 18 or older, nonsmokers, free of known disease, and not taking medications. They were asked to drink a 16-ounce can of

a Rockstar energy drink and a placebo -- with the same taste, texture, color and nutritional contents but without the caffeine and other stimulants -- within five minutes on two separate days. The energy drink had the following stimulants: 240 mg of caffeine, 2,000 mg of taurine and extracts of guarana seed, ginseng root and milk thistle. ... With the placebo, there was very little change. With the energy drink, however, many of the changes [after 30 minutes] were marked:

- Systolic blood pressure (the top number) - 6.2 percent increase
- Diastolic blood pressure (the bottom number) - 6.8 percent increase
- Average blood pressure - 6.4 percent increase
- Heart rate - none
- Caffeine in blood - increase from undetectable to 3.4 micrograms/mL
- Norepinephrine level (the stress hormone, which can give you the shakes when you have too much caffeine) in blood - increase from 150 pg/mL to 250 pg/mL

Writing in JAMA, the researchers said that these changes may predispose those who drink a single drink to increased cardiovascular risk. [The Washington Post](#)

## HUD proposes smoking ban in public housing, citing dangers of secondhand smoke

12 November - The government is seeking to ban smoking in all of the nation's 1.2 million public housing units, the latest step in a decades-long crackdown on tobacco products that help kill hundreds of thousands of Americans each year. In its proposed rule, announced Thursday, the Department of Housing and Urban Development would require more than 3,100 public housing agencies to go smoke-free within several years. The agencies must design policies prohibiting lit tobacco products in all living units, indoor common areas, administrative offices and in all outdoor areas near housing and administrative office buildings, HUD officials said. "We have a responsibility to protect public housing residents from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke, especially the elderly and children who suffer from asthma and other respiratory diseases," HUD Secretary Julián Castro said. [The Washington Post](#)

## Lower blood pressure target could save lives

9 November - Risk of heart troubles was lowered by 25 percent, while death risk was reduced 27 percent. Millions of Americans could avoid heart disease if doctors controlled

their high blood pressure more aggressively than previously recommended, a groundbreaking study contends. The SPRINT trial has revealed that a target systolic blood pressure of 120 reduces by about one-quarter the rate of death, heart attack, heart failure and stroke, compared with the currently recommended target pressures of 140 for people under age 60 and 150 for seniors. [WebMD](#)

## Surge in use of 'synthetic marijuana' still one step ahead of the law

11 November - A street drug made of various chemicals sprayed on tea leaves, grass clippings and other plant material continues to send thousands of people suffering from psychotic episodes and seizures to emergency rooms around the country. In 2015, calls to poison control regarding the drug already have almost doubled, compared to last year's total, and health professionals and lawmakers are struggling to keep up with the problem. Some call the drug K2, or spice. It's also widely known as "synthetic marijuana," because the key chemicals in the spray are often man-made versions of cannabinoids, a family of psychoactive substances found in marijuana. But the ingredients and concentrations used in this street drug vary widely, and it can be very different from marijuana in its effects. [NPR](#)

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### **USAFRICOM**

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## Guinea: The last place on earth with Ebola - getting Guinea to zero

6 November - ... Getting to zero — as the effort to finally stop the outbreak is known — has bedeviled governments and international health experts for months. Workers from aid groups have descended on the villages where the virus is still spreading, a promising experimental vaccine is being given to adults who have been in contact with a victim, and government officials, once reluctant to acknowledge the dangerous outbreak, are helping to wipe it out. But even with hundreds of millions of dollars spent to fight this outbreak, the approach to stamping out the disease remains uneven, at best. Workers on the front lines are still making rookie mistakes. Guards at Ebola checkpoints skip over some vehicle passengers for fever checks. Health workers use bare hands to touch people who might harbor the virus. Isolated communities experiencing Ebola for the first time are reluctant to take meticulous precautions and do not trust aid workers.

[The New York Times](#)

## Reports show meningitis vaccine's huge impact in Africa

10 November - A vaccine that was quickly developed to curb a much-feared meningitis strain that affects only Africa has been a resounding success, but more steps are need to

ensure that health programs in the affected countries ensure its long-term benefits, public health experts reported today. Reports that document the impact of the vaccine, introduced to African countries in 2010, and those that sort out further clinical questions and policy issues, were published yesterday in a Clinical Infectious Diseases supplement. ... In 1996 an outbreak of meningitis, a strain found only in sub-Saharan Africa's "meningitis belt," sickened about 250,000 people and led to more than 25,000 deaths in just a few months. The epidemic prompted a plea for help from African health ministers, which led to the development of the vaccine (MenAfriVac), which costs just \$0.50 a dose and is produced by the Serum Institute of India. ... In a stunning turnaround, in 2013 the 26 countries in the meningitis belt reported only four lab-confirmed meningitis A cases. [CIDRAP](#)

## West Africa counts down to possible end of Ebola, World Health Organization says

11 November - No new cases of Ebola were reported in Guinea last week, the first week since the full epidemic began that none of the Ebola-affected countries in West Africa have reported a case, the World Health Organization said Wednesday. That doesn't mean Guinea is free and clear — there could be cases that haven't been detected yet. But it may be the beginning of a countdown to the end of the epidemic in West Africa that has sickened more than 28,000 people and killed more than 11,000 of them. Guinea's the last of the three heavily hit West African countries to report any recent Ebola. Sierra Leone was declared Ebola-free on Saturday. [NBC News](#)

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### USCENTCOM

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## Egypt: Dengue fever

12 November - On 27 October 2015, the National IHR Focal Point of Egypt notified WHO of an outbreak of Dengue fever in a village in the Dayrout District of Assiut Governorate. Between 1 and 31 October 2015, a total of 253 cases were admitted to the Dayrout Fever Hospital due to acute febrile illness. ... A total of 28 out of the 118 serum samples were positive for Dengue virus type I by ELISA and PCR at the Central Public Health Laboratories. [WHO](#)

## Iraq's killer weather



12 November - ... [Iraq's] harsh climate, heavy rain as well as extremes in temperature, can also prove fatal. At least 58 people have died in the recent floods, most killed by electrocution in the capital. Another death was reported in Kalar, a town in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, where flooding caused a man's house to collapse on top of him.

Roads across the country were cut by the waters and sewage backed up. The government hastily assembled rescue teams. The downpours were particularly devastating in Baghdad, where crumbling infrastructure, weakened by 30 years of war and endemic corruption, played its part too. ... This year's rains also hit northern Iraq, causing flash floods in the Kurdistan cities of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Aid workers said water levels reached up 1.5 metres inside some houses. In Kalar, local authorities reportedly alerted civilians about the rising waters by firing off rounds of bullets. [IRIN](#)

## Pakistan: Could a smartphone app help stop the next polio outbreak in Pakistan?

12 November - ... In a pilot project funded by the UK Department for International Development, our group has been working with Lahore's municipal government to develop a tool to help track information better and to find out what incentives provide the best motivation for health workers. We distributed cheap smartphones to the health workers so they could send geo-coded information about their activities to a centralized dashboard. After they visited each home, they would send back data about how many children they had vaccinated, the time that the vaccination visit occurred, and the address it occurred at as coded by GPS location. We also changed the incentive for workers. Instead of a bonus that workers got regardless of how many vaccinations they did or households they visited, we introduced an incentive system that offered a bigger bonus for better performance. Each worker needed to visit 300 households in the first two days of the campaign, but they could set a goal in advance for how many houses they wanted to visit on each of these days.

[Medical Xpress](#)

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### USEUCOM

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## Gaza Strip: Water crisis deepens in the Gaza Strip

8 November - ... [The Gaza Strip's] water infrastructure has shuddered under the burden of an almost decade-long Israeli-Egyptian siege. ... In March, Israel began delivering an extra five million cubic metres (mcm) of water to Gaza, thereby doubling the amount that was previously delivered. ... However, the al-Muntar reservoir that was constructed to receive the increase was completely destroyed by Israel in 2014. In lieu of an acceptable reservoir, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) began to receive the water through temporary measures. After less than a month of increased Israeli water delivery, readings from Israeli and Palestinian water metres showed a disparity of 4,000cm - a huge shortfall between the amount the Israelis sent and the total delivered to Gaza, proving that Gaza's water network was unprepared for even a minor increase. [Al Jazeera](#)

## United Kingdom: Army malaria drug mefloquine safety inquiry to start

10 November - An inquiry into the use of a controversial anti-malarial drug given to British military personnel is to begin taking evidence. Mefloquine, or Lariam, is given to soldiers serving overseas but can cause anxiety, depression and nightmares. The Defence Select Committee is investigating after concerns from some military personnel over its safety. The government says it only prescribes Lariam after an individual risk assessment. Its manufacturers Roche say the benefits of Lariam outweigh its risks. [BBC News](#)

## United Kingdom: Ebola nurse Pauline Cafferkey 'has made full recovery'

12 November - A Scottish nurse who was readmitted to hospital after suffering complications arising from the Ebola infection has made a "full recovery", doctors say. Pauline Cafferkey initially contracted Ebola while working at a treatment centre in Sierra Leone last year. She was successfully treated at the Royal Free Hospital in London, but was taken there again in October after the virus caused her to develop meningitis. The hospital said Ms Cafferkey had now been discharged. In a statement, it said that the 39-year-old nurse was no longer infectious, was well enough to return to Scotland, and had been transferred to the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow. [BBC News](#)

## United Kingdom: Mental health cuts 'put lives at risk'

12 November - Cuts to adult mental health services in England have started damaging the quality of care given to patients, a report suggests. The review by the King's Fund think tank found there was now "widespread evidence of poor quality care". Researchers linked this to the use of unproven, cheaper services in a bid to balance the books. ... The review also pointed to growing evidence that there was inadequate support for those with severe problems. It said only 14% of patients had reported receiving appropriate care in a crisis, while hospital bed occupancy rates were routinely exceeding recommended levels - leading to patients being sent to units many miles away from their home. [BBC News](#)

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### **USNORTHCOM**

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## U.S.: CDC - Obesity rates up from 2011-2012

12 November - The percentage of Americans who are obese has risen noticeably in the past few years, defying efforts by health experts and policy makers to rein in the obesity epidemic. In 2011 to 2012, 35% of adults were obese, a number that had seemed to plateau

since 2003 to 2004. But in 2013 to 2014 that number rose to 38%, the CDC reported, on the basis of data from the latest National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which is released every 2 years. From 2011 to 2014, the prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents was 17%, which has not changed significantly from 2003. In addition, adult women had higher rates of obesity (38.3%) than did men (34.3%) during that period, said the report, which was compiled by a team from the CDC led by Cynthia Ogden, PhD. The results also varied significantly by race: prevalence was lowest for Asian adults (11.7%), followed by white adults (34.5%), Hispanic adults (42.5%), and black adults (48.1%).

[MedPage Today](#)

## **U.S.: Hawaii confronts dengue outbreak as 33 are infected**

11 November - Health officials in Hawaii have confirmed at least 33 cases of dengue fever, a mosquito-borne tropical illness not usually found there, and warned that the entire Big Island is at risk for its spread. Cases have been confirmed in towns across the Big Island, also known as Hawaii, with almost two dozen found in the western area of Captain Cook. Officials said they were working to identify all possible cases of the disease and were studying its transmission in the hope of keeping it from spreading to the rest of the island chain. ... The current cluster of cases is the first time that Hawaii has seen an outbreak of locally acquired dengue since 2011, the authorities said. Of the confirmed cases, 25 are residents of Hawaii and eight are tourists. Four of those who have contracted it are children.

[The New York Times](#)

## **U.S.: More babies are dying because of congenital syphilis**

12 November - The number of babies born with syphilis has shot up, and it's taking a toll. Of the 458 babies born last year with syphilis, 33 of were stillborn or died shortly after birth. From 2012 to 2014, there's been a 38 percent increase in cases of congenital syphilis. The spike reverses a previously falling trend in the rates of babies with syphilis from 2008 to 2012. ... As rates of new syphilis infections rise and fall, rates of fetal and congenital syphilis tend to follow suite, says Virginia Bowen, an epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and lead author on the study. ... It's hard to know the reason behind the recent surge in syphilis cases, Bowen says. "The only thing I can say is syphilis is going up right now across the board," she says. "From '13 to '14, we are seeing syphilis going up everywhere, including among the women, and we don't have the answers as to why." [NPR](#)

## **U.S.: New York City finds one in five adults has mental health problems**

12 November - At least one in five adult New Yorkers suffer from depression, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts or other psychological disorders every year, according to a report released on Thursday ahead of Mayor Bill de Blasio's new mental-health initiative. New York

City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene expects to release the plan, known as NYC Thrive, by the end of next month. It is aimed at preventing and treating psychological disorders among the city's 8.4 million residents. The "white paper" released Thursday outlines the size and scope of the problem facing the New York City. ... The number of residents experiencing psychological disorders such as depression has held steady in recent years, it finds. But mental health problems arising from drug and alcohol abuse have risen.

[Reuters](#)

## U.S.: Senate Dems concerned about health risks of climate change

3 November - Senate Democrats are raising concerns about the negative effect climate change could have on public health. More than a dozen Senate Democrats released a [report](#) on Tuesday from the Government Accountability Office that reveals shortcomings by federal agencies in addressing problems caused by climate change. ... Federal agencies need to do a better job of communicating the health risks caused by climate change, the senators say.

[The Hill](#)

## U.S.: Toxic dust from a dying California lake

9 November - On October 28, the smog-control agency for Los Angeles and the surrounding areas ... issued an odor advisory for the intense rotten-egg stench that was permeating the air of southern California's Coachella Valley. The source: The state's largest lake, the 350-square-mile Salton Sea, was burping up hydrogen sulfide, a gas created by the decaying organic matter trapped beneath the water. ... But the smell is only one small part of a more serious public-health problem, one that has the potential to affect millions of people in southern California and beyond. The Salton Sea is shrinking. ... As the playa is exposed, it dries quickly in the desert heat and sun; desert winds kick up the dust, creating a serious air-pollution problem. Imperial County, which houses the lake, currently has the highest asthma-hospitalization rates in the state. Because the lake has been used as an agricultural sump for more than a century, the dust also contains pesticides, and officials are concerned about the presence of potentially toxic heavy metals like arsenic. [The Atlantic](#)

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**USPACOM**

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## Australia: Queensland's worst outbreak of syphilis in 30 years rampant in state's north

12 November - Queensland's worst outbreak of syphilis in 30 years has spread across northern Queensland with 500 new cases since 2010. Only four years ago the Medical

Journal of Australia predicted syphilis – which causes lesions in the brain and blindness - would be eradicated in remote Queensland with screening and basic penicillin shots. ... The escalating rate of syphilis in Queensland's far north is 300 times more frequent amongst indigenous people, than among the non-indigenous community. [Brisbane Times](#)

## Malaysia dengue cases top 100,000

8 November - Malaysia now joins the Philippines and Thailand as the three southeast Asian countries who have reported more than 100,000 dengue fever cases in 2015. Health officials say that as of Nov. 6, Malaysia has reported a total of 102,217 cases nationwide and 282 deaths. This total is a 16 percent increase compared to the same period last year (86,192 cases and 162 deaths). Selangor province continues to report more than 50 percent of dengue cases nationwide. [Outbreak News Today](#)

## Marshall Islands: Army studies show reef fish by Kwajalein base are contaminated

9 November - Reef fish tested at the U.S. Army's Reagan Test Site in the Marshall Islands show high levels of toxic pollutants that could raise the risks of cancer and learning disabilities for those consuming the fish, said the head of the country's Environmental Protection Authority Thursday. Two key Army draft reports presented to the Marshall Islands recently conclude that because Marshall Islanders eat the "whole fish" and eat a lot of fish, human health risks for Marshall Islanders in Kwajalein dramatically exceed U.S. regional safety standards — particularly for fish found in the Army base harbor and near the base landfill, which are popular fishing spots. ... Army scientists have pegged much of the pollution to PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — a chemical long used in electrical transformers and other industrial products, but generally phased out because of health concerns. [Marianas Variety](#)

## Taiwan: Taiwan dengue death toll reaches 150

12 November - In Taiwan, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) for Dengue Outbreak reported an additional nine dengue-related fatalities, eight from Kaohsiung City, bringing the confirmed fatality total to 150. On Tuesday, a total of additional 395 indigenous dengue cases were confirmed in Taiwan (342 cases in Kaohsiung City and 48 cases in Tainan City). Since this summer, a cumulative total of 32,390 indigenous dengue cases, including 22,243 cases in Tainan City, 9,561 cases in Kaohsiung City, 185 cases in Pingtung City and imported and sporadic cases in other cities and counties, have been confirmed. [Outbreak News Today](#)

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## Colombia: CDC issues travel notice for Colombia due to Zika virus

6 November - Three weeks ago, the Colombia Health Ministry confirmed the first cases of local transmission of Zika virus in the country. This has prompted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to issue a travel notice for travelers to take precautionary measures to prevent contracting the mosquito borne virus as there is no vaccine or medicine to prevent Zika virus infection. Local transmission means that mosquitoes in Colombia have been infected with Zika virus and are spreading it to people.

[Outbreak News Today](#)

## Dengue in the Americas: 2 million cases and counting, deaths top 1,000

8 November - The number of dengue fever infections in the Western hemisphere has topped the 2 million case mark, nearly doubling the totals of all recent years with the exception of 2013 when about 2.4 million cases were seen. According to UN health officials, the total tally as of Nov. 6 is 2,007,421, including 1,007 fatalities, giving it a case-fatality rate of 0.05%. In all of 2014, 1,176,529 cases and 798 deaths were reported. Leading all countries is Brazil who has seen nearly 1.5 million cases or about 3/4s of the cases. Other countries reporting significant numbers include Mexico (166,255) and Colombia (76,462).

[Outbreak News Today](#)

## PAHO reports almost 3,000 new chikungunya cases

9 November - Countries in the Americas and Caribbean reported 2,938 recent cases of chikungunya, bringing the outbreak total to 1,763,736, according to a Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) update from late last week. ... The new numbers in the Nov 6 report bring the total this year to 616,967 suspected and confirmed cases. PAHO also reported 4 new chikungunya deaths—after reporting 5 new deaths the week before—bringing this year's fatality total to 72. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

## Suriname: Zika virus infection

11 November - On 2 November 2015, the National IHR Focal Point of Suriname notified PAHO/WHO of 2 autochthonous cases of Zika virus infection. Preliminary laboratory testing was conducted at the Academic Hospital Paramaribo. The investigation is ongoing and further information is pending. ... PAHO/WHO recommends that its Member States establish and maintain the capacity to detect and confirm cases of Zika virus infection, prepare their health services for a potential additional burden at all levels of health care, and implement an effective public communications strategy to reduce the mosquitoes that transmit this disease, particularly in areas where this vector is present. [WHO](#)

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