18 August 2017

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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The Army Public Health Update is a collection of articles taken verbatim from public sources to offer awareness of current health issues and the media coverage given to them. The articles do not necessarily represent US Army Medical Department opinions, views, policy, or guidance, and should not be construed or interpreted as being endorsed by the US Army Medical Command.
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Think Fungus: Fungal Disease Awareness Week
August 14–18, 2017, is the first Fungal Disease Awareness Week. CDC and partners have organized this week to highlight the importance of recognizing serious fungal diseases early enough in the course of a patient’s illness to provide life-saving treatment.

Increased awareness about fungal diseases is one of the most important ways we can improve early recognition and reduce delays in diagnosis and treatment. A key clue to when a sick person may have a fungal infection is that he or she is being treated with medications for other types of infection but does not get better.

We encourage healthcare providers and their patients to “Think Fungus” when symptoms of infection do not get better with treatment.

Laboratory characterization of noroviruses identified in specimens from Military Health System beneficiaries during an outbreak in Germany, 2016–2017
July 2017 - ... Norovirus has been identified as one of the top five etiologic agents of gastroenteritis among military populations. ... In 2016, among residents of the Federal Republic of Germany, norovirus incidence reported during the winter season was unusually high and reported earlier than usual. In November 2016, at least 14,872 laboratory-confirmed cases were reported in Germany, representing almost twice the median number of cases reported (7,810 cases) in the same month over the past 5 years. During the 2016–2017 norovirus season (October–March, Epidemiological Weeks 39–13), a total of 79,378 cases were reported by the Robert Koch Institute. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

Mattis says the Pentagon is still studying transgender military service, three weeks after Trump called for a ban
14 August - Defense Secretary Jim Mattis left the door open Monday to some transgender service members continuing to serve in the U.S. military, three weeks after President Trump said that they would not be allowed to do so “in any capacity.” Mattis, speaking to reporters at the Pentagon, said that he and his staff are still studying the issue, including how having transgender service members affects other members of their units. The Washington Post

'Parking lot' suicides roil VA hospitals
14 August - In a tragic and disturbing trend, veterans are resorting to suicide on the grounds of VA facilities, VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin said last week. "As some of you may know, veterans tend to come to a VA -- either drive a car or come to the VA -- and actually suicide on our property," Shulkin said last Tuesday, stressing the need for the Department of Veterans Affairs to do more to curb veteran suicides. ... "There are a number of reasons, not all of which I completely understand," for veterans to choose to end their lives at the VA, he said, "but one of them being they don't want their families to have to discover them." ... Shulkin said last week that the veteran suicide rate is "absolutely unacceptable" and briefly outlined the VA's commitment to bringing the rate down. Military.com
Plan to institute military oath against suicide could backfire, some experts say

10 August - A congressman who served in Afghanistan is championing an idea to request departing servicemembers sign an oath not to harm themselves, as a method to deter veteran suicides. ... Though it’s well-intentioned, the oath – essentially a no-suicide contract – is an outdated notion proven not to work, and it could even backfire, some experts said. “It won’t work, to put it bluntly,” said Craig Bryan, a psychologist and executive director of the National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah. “At best, it would be a neutral effect, but it could make things worse.” When struggling with suicidal thoughts, veterans who sign the commitment could feel an increased sense of shame and guilt, Bryan explained. Stars and Stripes

Rand study recommends improvements to mental health care for service members

16 August - A new survey of military mental health care providers raises concerns about gaps and barriers in delivering effective treatment to service members. One key concern: The amount of time mental health providers are able to spend with their patients. Less than half of 520 providers who responded to the Rand survey reported being able to see their patients diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or major depressive disorder weekly; the remainder saw their patients biweekly or less often. The providers cited patients’ difficulty in balancing their appointments and treatment schedules with their military duties, and not having enough time in their schedules to see patients as often as they would like. Military Times

Report: New Mexico VA office denies 90 percent of Gulf War claims

14 August - A Veterans Affairs office in New Mexico during the 2015 fiscal year denied more than 90 percent of benefit claims related to Gulf War illnesses, marking the ninth-lowest approval rating among VA sites nationwide, according to a federal report. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ Albuquerque office denied 592 of 640 Gulf War illness claims in 2015, which is the latest yearly data available. ... The report released in June from the Government Accountability Office found approval rates for Gulf War illness claims are one-third as high as for other disabling conditions. The Gulf War illness claims also took an average of four months longer to process. ... The illness includes a wide variety of symptoms and conditions, from fatigue and skin problems to insomnia and indigestion. It is believed the conditions may be the result of exposure to burn pits, oil well fires or depleted uranium weapons during service. Military.com

Study: Transgender troops ban could cost $960M

15 August - If the U.S. military implements President Donald Trump’s directive to ban
transgender people from serving, it would cost the U.S. government about $960 million, according to a report. The study released by the Palm Center estimates the cost to replace the transgender service members would be 114 times more than the $8.4 million to provide them care for gender transition. “President Trump said that he wants to fire honorably serving transgender troops in order to save money, but that begs the question, 'How much money would it cost to implement the president's vision?’” Palm Center executive director Aaron Belkin said. ... To come up with the $960 million estimate, the authors multiplied the number of those service members by the average cost of recruiting and training a replacement for those discharged. UPI

The Army is testing a new combat fitness test

15 August - ... A six-event slog dubbed the Army Combat Readiness Test [was rolled out] in an early August pilot at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. [The Center for Initial Military Training] sought to create a fitness test that most closely resembled the Army’s standard for combat skills: Warrior tasks and battle drills. “When you reverse-engineer combat specific tasks, you end up needing to train five different domains of physical fitness,” Lt. Col. David Feltwell, the principal doctrine developer for the Army’s physical readiness program. Those domains include muscular and cardiovascular endurance ... muscular strength, explosive strength and agility. Army Times

VA staffing new White House VA Hotline principally with veterans

11 August - Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that the two-month pilot phase of the new White House VA Hotline that began in June has demonstrated that Veterans calling the hotline respond best when their calls are answered by fellow Veterans and others with first-hand experience on their issues. As a result, VA announced that it will target highly qualified Veterans to staff the hotline going forward, instead of contracting the service to a third-party vendor, and is hiring additional VA personnel to complete the planned move to a 24-hour operation. ... This decision will delay the full-time stand-up of the 24-hour service by two months, to no later than October 15, in order to ensure the hiring and training processes are complete. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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GLOBAL

Air pollution ups stress hormones, alters metabolism

15 August - Breathing dirty air causes stress hormones to spike, new research suggests, which could help explain why long-term exposure to pollution is associated with heart
disease, stroke, diabetes, and a shorter life span. Dr. Haidong Kan of Fudan University in Shanghai, China, and colleagues looked specifically at the health effects of particulate matter (PM), small particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, from industrial sources that can be inhaled and become lodged in the lungs. While PM levels have gone down in North America in recent years, they are on the rise worldwide. ... Dr. Robert D. Brook of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, who co-authored an editorial accompanying the study, told Reuters Health by email that the stress responses triggered by these small pollution particles “are larger and more varied than previously known.” Reuters

Common chemicals in cosmetics, soaps tied to poor semen quality

17 August - Men who have been exposed to common chemicals known as parabens have lower testosterone levels and more sperm that are abnormally shaped and slow moving, according to a study that suggests these ingredients may contribute to infertility. Researchers examined lab tests done on 315 male patients of a fertility clinic in Poland to pinpoint issues they were having with reproduction. All of the men provided samples of urine, saliva, blood and semen for analysis. Compared to men who had low concentrations of parabens in their urine, men with high concentrations of the chemicals also had a larger proportion of sperm with what’s known as abnormal morphology, or unusual size or shape, that’s associated with infertility, the study found. Reuters

Democratic Republic of the Congo/Syria: More vaccine-derived polio cases reported in DRC and Syria

11 August - In its latest weekly update, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) said the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria have each reported three new cases of type 2 circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV2). The DRC now has a total of 7 cVDPV2 cases this year in two separate outbreaks, one in Haut Lomami province involving 5 cases with the most recent paralysis onset on Jun 13, and 2 in Maniema province with the most recent paralysis onset date of Apr 18, with another positive isolate collected from a healthy person on May 2. Syria now has 30 cVDPV2 cases in its outbreak, with the most recent paralysis onset occurring on Jun 16. Of the total, 29 are in Deir ez-Zur governorate and 1 is in Raqqa governorate. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)

Fire station air quality puts firefighters at risk

11 August - Firefighters have higher than average cancer rates, and while their exposure to carcinogens during fires is well known, a new study suggests exposures in fire stations contribute to their excess cancer risk, too. “Firefighters spend large portions of their shift waiting for calls in a station, during which they can be exposed to diesel exhaust from idling trucks (which is a known carcinogen) and off-gassing from contaminated post-fire gear (which may be contaminated with a variety of known and/or possible carcinogens),” researchers point out. ... “We know about the chemicals, heat and stress in the field, but what’s left out is the chronic low-level exposure at the fire station during day-to-day...
Google buys startup that turns smartphones into health diagnostic tools

15 August - Google has bought Senosis Health, a startup that turns smartphones into medical devices and collects various health stats, reports *GeekWire*. The Senosis apps can monitor lung health and hemoglobin counts, among other things, using functions on a smartphone including its accelerometer, microphone, flash and camera. For example, to measure the hemoglobin, Senosis’ app uses the phone’s flash to illuminate a user’s finger. *The Verge*

Health benefits of wind and solar offset all subsidies

17 August - Wind and solar energy are obviously essential in reducing carbon emissions, but they also have a remarkable side effect: saving lives. As they edge out fossil fuels, renewables are reducing not just carbon emissions, but also other air pollutants. And the result is an improvement in air quality, with a corresponding drop in premature deaths. A paper in *Nature Energy* this week estimate[s] the economic benefits of wind and solar power across the whole of the U.S. Berkeley environmental engineer Dev Millstein and his colleagues estimate that between 3,000 and 12,700 premature deaths have been averted because of air quality benefits over the last decade or so, creating a total economic benefit between $30 billion and $113 billion. The benefits from wind work out to be more than 7¢ per kilowatt-hour, which is more than unsubsidized wind energy generally costs. *Ars Technica*

Heat wave and mortality: A multicountry, multicommunity study

14 August - Few studies have examined variation in the associations between heat waves and mortality in an international context. ... We collected daily data of temperature and mortality from 400 communities in 18 countries/regions and defined 12 types of heat waves by combining community-specific daily mean temperature ≥90th, 92.5th, 95th, and 97.5th percentiles of temperature with duration ≥2, 3, and 4 d. We used time-series analyses to estimate the community-specific heat wave–mortality relation over lags of 0–10 d. ... Results indicate that high temperatures create a substantial health burden, and effects of high temperatures over consecutive days are similar to what would be experienced if high temperature days occurred independently. People living in moderate cold and moderate hot areas are more sensitive to heat waves than those living in cold and hot areas. Daily mean and maximum temperatures had similar ability to define heat waves rather than minimum temperature. *Environmental Health Perspectives*
Parasites: Desert plant compounds show activity against *Giardia, Naegleria*

16 August - Researchers ... have found that compounds produced by the creosote bush, a desert plant common to the Southwestern United States, exhibit potent anti-parasitic activity against the protozoa responsible for *Giardia* infections and an amoeba that causes an often-lethal form of encephalitis. The findings, published online August 9 in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, offer a starting point for widening the arsenal of antimicrobial agents, effective against deadly parasitic infections, scientists said. Outbreak News Today

Philanthropy king: Bill Gates gives away $4.6 billion, unveils new campaign to combat malaria

15 August - Bill Gates, the world’s richest person, continues to make news for his ten-figure philanthropy. ... [O]n Tuesday, Gates unveiled a new campaign to combat the spread of malaria. His pitch: the Gates Foundation will donate a mosquito net for every person who reads his latest blog post and takes a subsequent quiz. ... Dubbed “Mosquito Wars,” the campaign is part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s broader effort to combat malaria. Each donated net will go to families in the Inhambane region of Mozambique. ... [T]he Gates Foundation is also seeking to educate the public about the fight against malaria. ... Since 2000, the number of people killed by malaria each year has fallen by half, an achievement he calls “miraculous,” though he points out that 429,000 people still died from the disease last year. Forbes

Plants 'hijacked' to make polio vaccine

15 August - Plants have been "hijacked" to make polio vaccine in a breakthrough with the potential to transform vaccine manufacture, say scientists. The team at the John Innes Centre, in Norfolk, says the process is cheap, easy and quick. As well as helping eliminate polio, the scientists believe their approach could help the world react to unexpected threats such as Zika virus or Ebola. ... The vaccine is an "authentic mimic" of poliovirus called a virus-like particle. Outwardly it looks almost identical to poliovirus but - like the difference between a mannequin and person - it is empty on the inside. It has all the features needed to train the immune system, but none of the weapons to cause an infection. BBC News

Ricin vaccine gets additional funding

14 August - Soligenex, the company developing a heat-stable ricin vaccine, received an additional $2.5 million in funding from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), for work on RiVax, their ricin vaccine. The funding will advance the development of Soligenix’s thermostabilization technology, ThermoVax, which is used in combination with the company’s ricin toxin vaccine, RiVax. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)
Workplace fumes linked to signs of early lung disease

11 August - Workplace exposure to vapors, gas, dust and fumes increases the likelihood that a CT scan will show early signs of disease in the lung tissue, according to a U.S. study. ... The 5,702 study participants had chest CT scans at the start of the study and again six years later. They also reported their work exposure to vapors, gas, dust and fumes, and the researchers drew exposure estimates from data created by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Participants with higher exposure scores ... were likely to have more opaque areas typical of [interstitial lung disease] ... especially with dust or gas exposure. Self-reported exposure to vapor or gases was also linked with an almost doubled risk of interstitial lung abnormalities, the authors reported. Reuters

ZIKA VIRUS

Brazilian study sheds new light on Zika neuro complications in adults

14 August - ... [R]esearchers reported on 40 adults who were hospitalized with acute-onset neurologic symptoms who were evaluated for Zika infection Dec 5, 2015, and May 10, 2016. ... Of the 40 patients, 35 had evidence of recent Zika infection in blood or cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). Of those who were positive for Zika virus, 27 had Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS), 5 had encephalitis, 2 had transverse myelitis, and 1 had chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy. Among the 27 with GBS, 13 had cranial nerve involvement and three had facial numbness or trouble swallowing. Of the patients with encephalitis, two had accompanying neuromuscular findings, seen with other flavivirus neurologic complications. ... Nine of the patients required intensive care unit treatment and five required mechanical ventilation. CIDRAP

FDA approves emergency use declaration for multiplex Zika test

15 August - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued an Emergency Use Authorization for the first multiplex test for the Zika virus and three other viruses. The FDA made the authorization for CII-ArboViroPlex rRT-PCR Test developed by the Center for Infection and Immunity, or CII, at Columbia University's Mailman School of Medicine Monday. "The ArboViroPlex Test provides an easy and efficient means to simultaneously detect Zika and three other mosquito-borne viral infections that may present with similar clinical features," Nischay Mishra, the lead project scientist and associate research scientist at CII, said in a press release. The CII-ArboViroPlex rRT-PCR Test is the first multiplex test that can detect the Zika virus and all serotypes of dengue virus, chikungunya virus and West Nile virus simultaneously. UPI
Australia hit by worst flu outbreak on record in 2017

15 August - Australia is in the grip of the worst flu outbreak on record and experts are urging people to have a flu vaccine now to prevent further spread of the disease. More than 70,000 cases of flu have been reported so far this year including a record breaking 30,000 cases last month. ... The previous influenza record occurred in 2015 when more than 100,000 people tested positive for the flu. news.com.au

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

2016-2017 Influenza Season Week 31 ending August 5, 2017:

Novel Influenza A Virus:
Three additional human infections with novel influenza A viruses were detected in Ohio during week 31. Three persons, all attendees at the same agricultural fair, were infected with influenza A (H3N2) variant (H3N2v) viruses. All three patients were children younger than 18 years of age who reported direct exposure to swine in a fair setting during the week preceding illness onset. None of the three patients were hospitalized, and all have fully recovered from their illness.

Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) Mortality Surveillance:
Based on National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) mortality surveillance data available on August 10, 2017, 5.2% of the deaths occurring during the week ending July 22, 2017 (week 29) were due to P&I. This percentage is below the epidemic threshold of 6.0% for week 29. CDC

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

10 August - Febrile respiratory illness cases:
- Military Recruits - 59 positive of 139 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 4 positive of 17 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 2 positive of 16 tested. Naval Health Research Center
**Cyclospora in the U.S. and Canada**

17 August - In the **U.S.**, CDC has been notified of 570 laboratory-confirmed cases of cyclosporiasis in persons who became ill in 2017. ... The reports have come from 35 states. Texas alone has reported 230 cases as of Aug. 15. At least 251 (44%) of these persons did not report international travel and were likely infected in the United States, and became ill on or after May 1, 2017. At this time, no specific vehicle of interest has been identified, and investigations to identify a potential source (or sources) of infection are ongoing. ... In **Canada**, health officials report an additional 26 cases of locally acquired Cyclospora, bringing the total to 130 in three provinces: British Columbia (13), Ontario (115) and Quebec (2). The source of the outbreak has not been identified. Outbreak News Today

**Europe's egg-contamination scandal spreads as far as Hong Kong**

11 August - The scope of Europe’s contaminated egg scandal is expanding, reaching as far as Hong Kong. Farms in four countries — Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France — have been blocked from selling eggs after detection of the pesticide fipronil, EU trade and agriculture spokesman Daniel Rosario told reporters Friday. He says contaminated eggs have also been found in at least 11 other EU member states — Sweden, the United Kingdom, Austria, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Denmark — as well as in Switzerland and Hong Kong. Millions of eggs have been recalled from European supermarket shelves over concerns about the use of the pesticide. Fipronil is used to kill insects such as mites and is banned from use on animals in the human food chain. It was believed to have been mixed with a pest-control agent that is legal to use around poultry, contaminating their eggs. NPR

**Fighting slime: Researchers develop bacteria-killing plastic film**

16 August - Plastic films made with bacteria-killing polymers have been proven effective as a frontline defense — not to mention offense — in the battle against biofilms in food production operations. A preferred place of residence for pathogens such as *Listeria* and *E. coli*, biofilms form easily and are extremely difficult to eradicate. ... By modifying the polymer matrix of plastic films, researchers have developed a rechargeable disinfecting material that can be applied to conveyor belts, food-contact surfaces, utensils and other equipment and surfaces. ... They not only succeeded in preventing the formation of biofilms by killing bacteria, but the researchers were also able to kill existing biofilms on food production surfaces by applying their modified plastic film.
OIE reports on antimicrobial agents, animals in 130 countries

15 August - The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) is out with a first-time overview of the use of antimicrobial agents in animals. ... A total of 130 OIE member countries, or 72 percent of the 180 member nations, contributed data to the report. ... The report found 96 nations, or 74 percent, of the 130 OIE member countries do not permit antimicrobial agents for growth promotion in animals. Tylosin and Bacitracin were the most frequently mentioned antimicrobial agents used for growth promotion in the 25 countries where such use is permitted. Colistin use for growth is allowed by 10 of the OIE members.

Almonds may help boost cholesterol clean-up crew

10 August - Eating almonds on a regular basis may help boost levels of HDL cholesterol while simultaneously improving the way it removes cholesterol from the body, according to researchers. In a study, researchers compared the levels and function of high-density lipoprotein (HDL cholesterol) in people who ate almonds every day, to the HDL levels and function of the same group of people when they ate a muffin instead. The researchers found that while participants were on the almond diet, their HDL levels and functionality improved. Penn State News

A vaccine for addiction? Don’t get your hopes up just yet: expert

14 August - Vaccines are usually seen as fighting infectious diseases, but what about a vaccine for addiction? HHS Secretary Tom Price says one is being developed but experts say such a shot is not likely in the near future. Price, who has been looking for ways for the FDA to fight the opioid crisis, offered some hope for such treatment during a White House press session about the current situation. ... But one expert said that treatment option has a long way to go. “I can’t imagine the vaccine would be on the market before the Trump administration is over,” Thomas Kosten, M.D., professor of psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine told CNN. ... Kosten previously led a team of scientists that was studying a therapeutic cocaine vaccine called TA-CD. ... That vaccine failed in a phase 3 clinical trial as it didn’t show significant improvement in getting trial subjects off the drug, even when adequate antibody levels were attained. “We are concerned that adequately immunized
subjects may have increased their cocaine use to overcome the competitive anticocaine antibody blockade," wrote Kosten’s team. ... Opiant Pharmaceuticals ... recently in-licensed a heroin vaccine developed by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in collaboration with the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) under the NIH. Fierce Pharma

'Fat but fit' still risk heart disease

15 August - People who are overweight or obese are at increased risk of heart disease even if they appear medically healthy, experts are warning. The work ... is further evidence against the idea people can be "fat but fit". The researchers studied health data on more than half a million people in 10 European countries, including the UK. Normal blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels were no assurance of good heart health among obese people. After a follow-up period of more than 12 years, 7,637 of the people in the study had developed heart disease. Weight appeared to be a risk factor. In the study, people who were overweight or obese but had healthy blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol readings were about 28% more likely to develop heart disease than individuals with similar readings and a healthy bodyweight. BBC News

How exercise could help you learn a new language

16 August - Learning a second language as an adult is difficult. But the process may be eased if you exercise while learning. A new study reports that working out during a language class amplifies people’s ability to memorize, retain and understand new vocabulary. The findings provide more evidence that to engage our minds, we should move our bodies. The New York Times

Little evidence shows cannabis helps chronic pain or PTSD

14 August - Even though pain and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are among the most common reasons people use medical marijuana in the U.S., there isn’t much proof cannabis works for either one of these conditions, two research reviews suggest. That’s because there hasn’t been enough high-quality research to produce conclusive evidence of the benefits or harms of cannabis for pain or PTSD, the two studies found. Both studies were conducted by a team of researchers at the Veterans Health Administration and published in Annals of Internal Medicine. ... They found only low-quality evidence that cannabis may help nerve pain, and this wasn’t for smoking pot, it was for what’s known as nabiximols, or oral mixtures sprayed into the mouth. A separate analysis of five previous studies of cannabis for PTSD found too little data to determine whether this would help relieve symptoms. Reuters

Opioid overdose ICU admissions increasing

13 August - Deaths associated with opioid overdoses in hospital intensive care units nearly doubled over a seven-year period from 2009 and 2015, and the costs of treating overdose victims in the ICU has skyrocketed, researchers report. The average cost of caring for an
opioid overdose patient in the ICU increased by 58% from $58,500 to $92,400, according to a retrospective analysis of hospital billing records from 162 hospitals in 44 states. Admissions to ICUs linked to opioid overdoses increased by 34% at the hospitals from January of 2009 to September 2015. MedPage Today

'Tanning tax' called public health success

15 August - It didn’t get much coverage, but both the Senate and House plans to replace the Affordable Care Act would have scrapped the so-called “tanning tax,” a 10% consumer-paid tax on nonmedical UV light tanning services. From a public health perspective, the provision has been a huge success, a Health Affairs Blog post argued. Since the ACA went into effect, the proportion of high school students who used tanning beds fell by more than half, from 15.6% to 7.3%. Of course, there was also an economic impact -- some 10,000 tanning salons closed down since the law went into effect. (However, a steady drumbeat of negative press about indoor tanning may have played a role, too.) MedPage Today

Teen drug overdose death rate climbed 19% in one year

16 August - The rate of teen drug overdose deaths in the United States climbed 19% from 2014 to 2015, from 3.1 deaths per 100,000 teens to 3.7 per 100,000, according to data released this week. The new numbers involve teens ages 15 to 19 and were released by the National Center for Health Statistics. Most of the overdose deaths were unintentional and driven primarily by opioids, including both prescribed painkillers such as oxycodone and illicit drugs such as heroin and street fentanyl. Mirroring the larger population, there was a downward trend in overdose deaths from methadone and prescription opioids in recent years but an uptick in deaths involving heroin and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. ... The 2016 Monitoring the Future survey showed a continuing decline in the use of illicit substances -- marijuana, alcohol and tobacco -- and misuse of prescription drugs among teens. The annual survey is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. CNN

U.S.: Public members appointed to new federal effort to address serious mental illness

16 August - The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced today the appointment of national experts to guide a new initiative to better serve Americans with serious mental illness. The Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee (ISMICC) was established by the 21st Century Cures Act to improve federal coordination of efforts that address the pressing needs of adults with serious mental illness and children and youth with serious emotional disturbance. Individuals with these conditions too often lack access to evidence-based treatment and supports and experience high rates of suicide, unemployment, homelessness, criminal justice involvement and other negative outcomes. HHS.gov
You can order a dozen STD tests online – but should you?

13 August - America is losing the battle against sexually transmitted infections. Cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis all hit record-high numbers in 2015. Tens of thousands contract HIV every year in the U.S., and oral cancers caused by human papillomavirus are increasing. So startups are popping up online to help serve what they see as unmet demand for STD testing. ... "The biggest advantage of home tests in general is if you catch HIV or chlamydia early on, you can change the natural course of the disease," Ault says. Few options exist to make the process easier. So far, there is just one test approved that gives rapid results in the home, and it's for HIV. ... The CDC generally supports the idea of at-home STD testing, according to John Papp, a microbiologist in the CDC's Division of STD Prevention. ... But little regulation exists for online, at-home STD testing. NPR

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USAFRICOM

Ethiopia: 700,000 at risk of starvation in Ethiopia - Oxfam

15 August - Food insecurity in the Somali region of Ethiopia has worsened, putting 700,000 people on the verge of starvation, according to Oxfam International. The humanitarian organization says that about 8.5 million people across the country face a high risk of hunger, a 30 percent increase since the beginning of the year. Food shortages and hunger have led to displacement and negative coping mechanisms such as increases in child labor, early marriage and school dropouts, according to a recent joint report by the Ethiopian government and humanitarian partners. "Sex for food and child labor were reported in some woredas [districts]," the report said. Much of Ethiopia is now in the midst of its lean season, and some people at risk have not received any food distributions since May. VOA

Sierra Leone: At least 600 missing in Sierra Leone mudslides; over 300 dead

16 August - The death toll from massive mudslides in Sierra Leone's capital was certain to rise Tuesday as bodies washed up on a beach and workers searched for an untold number of people buried in their homes. The Red Cross estimated that 600 people were still missing. Authorities have said more than 300 people were killed in and around Freetown on Monday following heavy rains. Many were trapped under tons of mud as they slept. The Connaught Hospital mortuary in central Freetown was overwhelmed on Tuesday with more
than 300 bodies, many spread on the floor. "The magnitude of the destruction as a result of
the disaster is such that the number of victims in the community who may not come out
alive may likely exceed the number of dead bodies already recovered," said Charles
Mambu, a civil society activist and resident of one affected area, Mount Sugar Loaf. In a
sign of hope, he said, "two bodies were brought out alive from the debris last evening."

USA TODAY

**Somalia: Continued measles spread in Somalia crisis prompts WHO call for donor support**

16 August - Against the backdrop of a drought and outbreaks of cholera and measles in
Somalia, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the country’s health ministry today
issued an urgent call for $6.8 million to step up the response and vaccinate 4.2 million
children in November. ... The current cholera outbreak in Somalia is the country's largest
outbreak in 5 years, and more than 57,000 cases, 809 of them fatal, have been reported as
of Jul 31. ... Regarding measles, the country is grappling with its worst outbreak in 4 years,
with more than 14,823 suspected cases reported this year as of Jul 31. For comparison, since
2014 Somalia averages about 5,000 to 10,000 measles cases a year. CIDRAP

USCENTCOM

**Middle East: Amphetamine combo linked to IS more potent than thought**

16 August - A synthetic psychoactive drug linked to substance abuse in the Middle East and
said to be a fund-raising tool and stimulant for Islamist militants is more dangerous than
previously thought, scientists said on Wednesday. The stimulant, called fenethylline and by
its trade name Captagon, is a super-boosted amphetamine, they said, and has unique
chemical complexities allowing it to induce potent psychoactive effects far more rapidly
than amphetamines alone. ... They warned its popularity among drug users could spread
from the Middle East across the world. Experts estimate that in Saudi Arabia, some 40
percent of drug users between the age of 12 and 22 are addicted to fenethylline. VOA

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

17 August – Between 4 July and 12 August 2017, the national IHR Focal Point of Saudi
Arabia reported 26 additional cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus
(MERS-CoV) infection including six deaths, and two deaths among previously reported
cases. Among the 26 newly reported cases, 13 are associated with a cluster in a hospital in
Al Jawf Region, Saudi Arabia. ... Globally, 2066 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV including at least 720 related deaths have been reported to WHO. WHO

Yemen: Yemen cholera infections exceed 500,000

14 August - The UN health agency reports that Yemen's cholera epidemic has gotten worse. According to a report released by the World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday, 503,484 people have become infected and 1,975 have died in the months since the outbreak began in April. “Yemen’s health workers are operating in impossible conditions,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement. “Thousands of people are sick, but there are not enough hospitals, not enough medicines, not enough clean water,” he added. The collapse of Yemen’s infrastructure … has created the conditions for the epidemic to become the world’s largest, with as many as 5,000 infections contracted per day. Deutsche Welle

Yemen: Yemen's blood bank faces threat of closure within days

12 August - Yemen’s blood bank has sent out an urgent appeal to anyone who will listen as war and a blockade on the capital, Sanaa, may force the centre to close within a week. The National Blood Transfusion Centre director, Dr Adnan al-Hakimi, said the crisis emerged after French medical charity Doctors Without Borders (known by its French initials, MSF) informed the bank it was suspending its aid after more than two years of work. ... An MSF spokeswoman said the charity had handed over its support for the blood bank to the World Health Organization. Al Jazeera

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France: 133% leap in children admitted to ER for marijuana, study finds

14 August - … The number of children who were admitted to emergency rooms for unintentional marijuana intoxication increased by 133% in France over an 11-year period, according to a new study. Marijuana intoxication can occur when a child accidentally ingests a marijuana product or inhales marijuana smoke. ... Cannabis is illegal in France, but it has the highest rate of marijuana use in Europe, said Dr. Isabelle Claudet, lead author of the study. ... From 2004 to 2014, 235 children were admitted to ERs with cannabis intoxication, and there was a 133% increase in the admissions rate for it. The number of calls to poison control centers related to cannabis exposure in children increased by 312% in the same period. CNN
United Kingdom: Rare fungus found in 200 patients in 55 UK hospitals

15 August - A rare fungus that can cause drug-resistant infections has been found in around 200 patients in more than 55 hospitals across Britain, health officials said on Tuesday. Around a quarter of the cases of *Candida auris* have caused infections with symptoms, Public Health England (PHE) said, including in 27 patients who developed bloodstream infections. The fungus, also known as *C. auris* and first identified in Japan eight years ago, is rare and low-risk, but has a propensity to spread between hospital patients. "Most cases detected have not shown symptoms or developed an infection as a result of the fungus," said Colin Brown, a microbiologist with PHE’s national infection service.

*Reuters*

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USNORTHCOM

U.S.: *Aedes* mosquitoes entered California years before detection

11 August - A new study used genetic analysis to further understand how and under what circumstances the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito was introduced to California. Researchers said that the vector, which can transmit yellow fever, dengue, and Zika, was introduced years before mosquito surveillance teams detected the species and handled cooler temperatures than previously thought possible. ... The mosquitoes from Northern California shared their genetics with those with the southern central United States, while those in Southern California came from southwestern states. ... The genetic diversity and two different invasion periods mean that controlling *Aedes* in California and other states will not be as straightforward as hoped. Re-invasion is more likely when species are genetically diverse, and the presence of the mosquitoes in more temperate climates may mean they are hardier than previously thought. *CIDRAP*

U.S.: *E. coli* outbreak after Mesa County Fair in Grand Junction, CO

14 August - At least eight people are sick with Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* infections after visiting the Mesa County Fair in Grand Junction, Colorado, according to a news release by Mesa County Public Health. The fair was held from July 25 to July 29, 2017. This type of pathogenic bacteria is common in cattle, sheep, and goats, according to the press release. People can get sick when they come into contact with these animals, their bedding, fence railings, or anything in the surrounding environment. *Food Poisoning Bulletin*
U.S.: Fleas test positive for the plague in parts of Arizona

14 August - Health officials are urging people to take precautions after a second Arizona county in two weeks confirmed that fleas in the area have tested positive for plague. The announcement by Navajo County Public Health officials on Friday comes one week after Coconino County officials found prairie dogs in the area to be carrying fleas with the plague. ... Health officials have notified the residents whose property will be treated. The area will be closely monitored to determine if further action is required. ... To limit possible exposure, people are encouraged to avoid rodent burrows and keep dogs on a leash as required by Arizona state law. WSMV

U.S.: Health officials - whooping cough on rise in Alabama

15 August - Whooping cough is on the rise in the state, and the Alabama Department of Public Health is warning that babies less than a year old can be put at risk by adults whose immunizations have lost effectiveness over time. According to information released Monday by the Immunization Division of the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), the state has seen 151 cases so far in 2017, compared to 113 in all of 2016. Cases have been found "statewide," according to the ADPH, with multiple outbreaks in Calhoun and Chambers counties. ... [O]ne generally accepted reason from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is that although the pertussis vaccine is effective, it tends to decrease in immunity over time. AL.com

U.S.: Heavily-used pesticide linked to breathing problems in farmworkers' children

16 August - New study finds that elemental sulfur is linked to reduced lung function, more asthma-related symptoms and higher asthma medication use in children living about a half-mile or less from farms that use the pesticide. ScienceDaily

U.S.: Higher rural suicide rates driven by use of guns

17 August - Suicide rates in rural areas of Maryland are 35-percent higher than in the state's urban settings, a disparity that can be attributed to the significantly greater use of firearms in rural settings, according to new research. ... The findings ... suggest that policymakers grappling with rising rates of suicide in the United States might need to develop more robust rural firearm safety and control initiatives to deal with this pressing public health problem. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News

U.S.: Many nurses lack knowledge of health risks to mothers after childbirth

17 August - In recent months, mothers who nearly died in the hours and days after giving birth have repeatedly told ProPublica and NPR that their doctors and nurses were often
slow to recognize the warning signs that their bodies weren’t healing properly. A study published Tuesday ... substantiates some of those concerns. Researchers surveyed 372 postpartum nurses nationwide and found that many of them were ill-informed about the dangers mothers face after giving birth. Needing more education themselves, they were unable to fulfill their critical role of educating moms about symptoms like painful swelling, headaches, heavy bleeding and breathing problems that could indicate potentially life-threatening complications. NPR

U.S.: NIOSH releases lifting equation mobile app

17 August - NIOSH has released a free mobile app for smart phones and other mobile devices to help workers be safe when manually lifting objects. The app, NLE Calc, is based on the Revised NIOSH Lifting Equation, an internationally recognized standard for safe lifting. The new app is designed to assist workers in manufacturing, health care, retail, and other industries where lifting is part of the job. NLE Calc determines a score based on the data a user enters about a lifting task and offers recommendations to optimize the task or perform it differently. Occupational Health & Safety

U.S.: Occupational distribution of campylobacteriosis and salmonellosis cases — Maryland, Ohio, and Virginia, 2014

18 August - Campylobacter and Salmonella are leading causes of bacterial gastroenteritis in the United States with >1 million cases reported annually. These pathogens are primarily transmitted through consumption of contaminated food, but animal-to-human and human-to-human transmission also occur. Occupational transmission has been reported, but there is limited information regarding patterns of disease by occupation. In 2014, 2,977 campylobacteriosis and 2,259 salmonellosis cases were reported in Maryland, Ohio, and Virginia; 1,064 (60%) and 847 (56%) patients, respectively, were employed. Persons in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations and health care and technical occupations were at increased risk for both campylobacteriosis and salmonellosis. Persons in food preparation and serving–related occupations and personal care and service occupations were also at higher risk for salmonellosis. Increased risk for enteric infection among workers in agriculture, health care, food, and personal care occupations might be related to workplace exposures to pathogens. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: South Carolina sues OxyContin maker Purdue over opioid marketing

15 August - South Carolina sued Purdue Pharma LP on Tuesday, becoming the latest state or local government to accuse the OxyContin maker of deceptive marketing practices that have contributed to a national opioid addiction epidemic. The lawsuit by South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson, filed in Richland County Court of Common Pleas in Columbia, accuses the company of the unfair and deceptive marketing of opioid painkillers.
Wilson claimed Purdue has told doctors that patients who receive prescriptions for opioids generally will not become addicted and those who appeared to be were only "pseudoaddicted" and needed more of the drugs. Reuters

U.S.: Work can be stressful, dangerous and sometimes great

14 August - ... Americans work hard, and it takes a physical and mental toll, not to mention that it frequently cuts into personal time, according to a comprehensive survey on working conditions the nonpartisan RAND Corporation published Monday. ... What the researchers found was that more than 1 in 4 Americans surveyed say they don’t have enough time to do their jobs, with about half of Americans reporting that they do some work in their free time. ... In addition, 1 in 5 reported experiencing verbal abuse, threats, humiliating behavior or unwanted sexual attention at work in the past month; or they experienced bullying, harassment or sexual harassment in the past year. ... Seventy-five percent of people surveyed report intense or repetitive physical exertion on the job at least 25 percent of the time. ... Additionally, 55 percent of workers report they are exposed to physical risks like smoke, fumes, infectious materials, extreme temperatures and vibrations from hand tools about 25 percent of the time. NPR

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Australia: Study - Hendra virus threat rises as bat habitats change

15 August - Encroaching humans, deforestation, and urbanization are some of the reasons more people are becoming infected with Hendra virus, according to Australian researchers writing in Scientific Reports. Fruit bat habitats, known reservoirs for a number of diseases, including Hendra virus, are changing rapidly as human populations displace the animals. Hendra virus “spills over” from bats to horses to humans. It was first reported along Australia’s east coast in 1994; by 2017, there were 60 outbreaks of the disease, which has killed four people. ... “The human footprint, proximity to woody savanna, and vegetation loss were additional components of the landscape required to adequately describe the spatial dependence of spillover across eastern Australia,” the authors reported in a press release from the University of Sydney. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

India: Outrage mounts as sixty children die because hospital’s oxygen supply is cut off over unpaid bills

14 August - Parents and politicians have denounced as a “massacre” the deaths of more than 60 children after oxygen supplies to a hospital in northern India were allegedly cut off
because of an unpaid bill. Medical staff passed around manual resuscitation bags as they fought to save the children when the hospital’s piped oxygen ran out on Thursday night. At least 30 of the dead were newborns. There was mounting fury across India as local officials, hospital staff and suppliers blamed each other for the tragedy. Hospital bosses were accused of ignoring the unpaid debt and failing to act when warned that oxygen supplies were running low. They had still not been restored by Saturday night. The Australian

Philippines: Losing the fight against HIV in the Philippines

12 August - The Philippines is facing an unprecedented HIV crisis. New infections have doubled in the past 6 years to more than 10,000 new cases last year alone. Undoubtedly, stigma remains one of the major reasons for the spread of HIV in the Philippines. … This growing rate of infection stands in stark contrast to the absence of comprehensive public and health promotion policy to reach key at-risk populations. In 2016, 83% of new HIV cases were among men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women who have sex with men (TGW), most of whom were aged between 15–24 years. The Lancet

Philippines: Amnesty Int'l says Duterte's drug war reaches new level of barbarity

17 August - International human rights group Amnesty International (AI) on Thursday said the Duterte administration’s war on drugs has reached a new level of “barbarity” after 32 drug suspects were killed in simultaneous police operations in Bulacan. “These shocking deaths are a reminder that President [Rodrigo] Duterte’s lawless ‘war on drugs’ continues unabated and actually appears to be plumbing new depths of barbarity, with police routinely gunning down suspects, violating the key right to life and completely flouting due process,” said James Gomez, AI’s director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, in a statement. GMA News Online

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USOUTHCOM

Americas: Countries in the Americas see small rise in chikungunya cases

14 August - Nations and territories in the World Health Organization’s Americas region reported 153 more suspected, confirmed, and imported chikungunya cases, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said in its latest weekly update. The region has now reported 141,419 cases for the year. The number of deaths from the disease remained at 51. … Most of the new cases were reported from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and
Bolivia. Also, Guadeloupe and Martinique—located in the Americas' Latin Caribbean subregion—reported a few more cases. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

**Brazil: Brazil monitoring Oropouche virus threat**

15 August - Sporadic cases of Oropouche fever—a vector-borne illness with symptoms similar to dengue, chikungunya, and Zika—have been detected in Brazil's Amazonas state since 2011, according to an investigation by the Fiocruz Institute and state-based surveillance. In a report from Brazil's public radio network, translated and posted yesterday by ProMED Mail, a Fiocruz official said that of 306 samples from 20 cities in Amazonas state between 2011 and 2016, 9 were positive. ... ProMED moderators said it's not clear if the Oropouche virus is emerging in Brazil, but it has the potential to pose another public health challenge to the country. They noted that sporadic cases or outbreaks of Oropouche fever can be expected in Brazil, where the midge that spreads the disease is present. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)

**Venezuela: Malaria infections spreading in crisis-ridden Venezuela**

15 August - The health clinic in the mining town of Las Claritas has broken windows and a sign informing patients that "malaria treatments are not available until further notice". ... According to some reports, 18 of Venezuela's 23 states are experiencing an outbreak. Ironically, the country was the first in Latin America to declare itself malaria-free in 1961, but the current outbreak is spiralling out of control. ... In the first 27 weeks of this year, doctors estimate that more than 150,000 of Bolivar's two million inhabitants contracted or had a relapse of malaria. In comparison, in the entire year of 2016 there were 242,976 cases of malaria, according to the Venezuelan Society on Public Health: a historic peak, but nothing compared with this year's prospects. The non-governmental organisation predicts that nearly one million Venezuelans will be infected this year - more than three times the number of people infected last year. Al Jazeera
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