

18 December 2015

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

The Army Public Health Weekly 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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Notice

The Army Public Health Weekly Update won't be published over the holidays. We'll resume publication on **8 January 2016.**

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- CDC issues travel notices for several countries due to Zika virus
- Brazil: Suspected microcephaly cases in Brazil rise by 640 in past week
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Army Safety and Occupational Health Objectives

The Army Safety and Occupational Health Objectives, released annually by the Army chief of staff and secretary of the Army, provide senior leaders and subordinate commanders specific safety goals to meet in the upcoming fiscal year.

Fiscal 2015 was the Army's safest year on record for accidental Soldier fatalities and a continuation of a years-long downward trend. This year's safety and occupational health objectives were formulated to revitalize leader commitment to protect the force from mishaps, injuries and illness while giving individual commanders latitude in addressing their formations' unique areas of risk.

STAND-TO!
THE OFFICIAL FOCUS OF THE U.S. ARMY

U.S. MILITARY

Army Medicine researchers evaluate promising new malaria drug

11 December - Researchers at the U.S. Army Medical Materiel Development Activity and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have just completed a critical evaluation of a promising treatment for severe and complicated malaria. ... "We were able to work with the CDC to have the intravenous artesunate formulation available to physicians in a compassionate use capacity under an investigational new drug protocol," said Col. Bryan L. Smith, M.D., a USAMMDA researcher and lead investigator on the study. ... "We found that IV artesunate is safe and effective in patients with severe and complicated malaria," said Twomey. " ... Median time to discharge from the hospital intensive care unit was four days, even though many patients had severe liver disease or cerebral malaria before treatment.

[The Standard](#)

Army welcomes new surgeon general



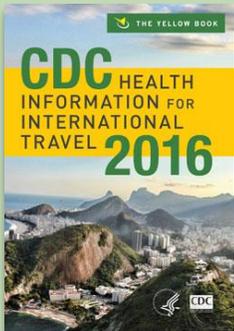
14 December - Maj. Gen. Nadja West has been sworn in as the Army's new surgeon general. West, who most recently served as the Joint Staff surgeon at the Pentagon, was sworn in Friday by Acting Army Secretary Eric Fanning. She succeeds Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho, who is retiring Tuesday. In addition to being the Army surgeon general, West also will serve as commanding general of U.S. Army Medical Command. As part of her new assignment, West will soon be promoted to the rank of lieutenant general. This will make her the first black woman in the Army to hold that rank, according to information from MEDCOM. West also is the Army's first black surgeon general. West, a West Point graduate, has a doctorate of medicine from George Washington University School of Medicine. [Army Times](#)

Brain's signaling systems might determine PTSD severity

10 December - People with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) appear to have an imbalance between two of the brain's signaling systems, a new study suggests. The greater the imbalance between the two neurochemical systems -- serotonin and substance P -- the more severe the PTSD symptoms, the Swedish researchers reported. ... [Researchers] used PET scanners to measure the relationship between the two brain signaling systems. ... "At present, PTSD is often treated with selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) which have a direct effect on the serotonin system. SSRI drugs provide relief for many, but do not help everybody," study author Andreas Frick, a researcher in the department of psychology at Uppsala University, in Stockholm, said in a university news release. "Restoring the balance between the serotonin and substance P systems could become a new treatment strategy for individuals suffering from traumatic incidents," he suggested. [U.S. News and World Report](#)

**CDC Health
Information for
International Travel
2016**

CDC Health Information for International Travel (commonly called the Yellow Book) is published every two years as a reference for those who advise international travelers about health risks. The Yellow Book is written primarily for health professionals, but is a useful resource for anyone interested in healthy international travel. The CDC Yellow Book for 2016 is now available online.



Combat-related lung diseases lack diagnosis guidelines, researchers say

15 December - ... More than 360 veterans say they have been diagnosed with a rare lung disease — either constrictive bronchiolitis or idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis — not normally found in a young, healthy population. ... [Anthony] Szema said that because the symptoms of Iraq/Afghanistan War-Lung Injury bear similarities to conditions like asthma and exercise-induced bronchospasms, determining its prevalence among troops has been difficult, and treating it has been even tougher. Pulmonologists at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and National Jewish Health ... have found through lung biopsies that at least 50 troops developed constrictive bronchiolitis, a rare disease that affects the smallest passageways of the lungs. But some physicians have objected to conducting biopsies on affected troops because those kinds of risky invasive procedures provide little information besides a diagnosis, since constrictive bronchiolitis has no cure. Szema and his colleagues argue that steps can be taken to determine whether a veteran needs a lung biopsy. [Military Times](#)

New Army breastfeeding memo bans bathroom as lactation area

16 December - The Army's updated breastfeeding and lactation policy forbids the use of restrooms as lactation spaces, offers suggestions on the duration of breaks for nursing mothers and requires commanders to provide such breaks at least until the child's first birthday — addressing many issues raised by critics of the initial directive. ... The changes, published in a Nov. 10 memo from acting Army Secretary Eric Fanning that rescinded the September guidance, went into effect immediately, Army spokesman Paul Prince said.

[Army Times](#)

Scans show many injured U.S. vets may have brain 'scarring'

13 December - New research finds brain "scarring" in many members of the U.S. military who suffered concussions during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. "More than half of the military service members we studied have one or more lesions on the brain that can be thought of as scars in their brains," said study lead author Dr. Gerard Riedy, a radiologist specializing in the brain at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. The study involved more than 800 service members with blast-related concussions. More than four out of five reported one or more blast-related incidents, and almost two-thirds said they lost consciousness. ... The Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center estimates that more than 300,000 service members were diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries between 2000 and 2015. Bombs often caused the injuries.

[U.S. News and World Report](#)

**CDC Interactive
"What's My HIV
Risk" Tool**

CDC's new, interactive HIV risk tool lets you enter information about you and your partner and yields a relative HIV risk based on condom use, PrEP use, current STI status, insertive vs receptive vaginal and anal sex then gives you feedback. You can also compare the relative risk of different kinds of sex. This visual tool helps demonstrate lower vs. higher risk options.



VA to change disability claims rules for Camp Lejeune veterans

17 December - The Veterans Affairs Department has determined that eight medical conditions are linked to service at Camp Lejeune, N.C. from 1953 to 1987, and veterans with these diseases who were stationed at the sprawling Marine Corps base are eligible for disability compensation. VA officials said Thursday that these eight diseases that have been determined to be service-connected to consuming contaminated drinking water at the base: kidney cancer, liver cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, leukemia, multiple myeloma, scleroderma, Parkinson's disease and aplastic anemia or other myelodysplastic syndromes. ... [The] risk of developing these illnesses is elevated by exposure to contaminants found in the water, including perchloroethylene, trichloroethylene, benzene and other volatile organic compounds. [Military Times](#)

VA sets national policy for robotic legs for paralyzed vets

17 December - The Department of Veterans Affairs has agreed to pay for robotic legs that could allow scores of paralyzed veterans with spinal cord injuries to walk again. Veterans have been petitioning the VA to do this because many cannot afford the \$77,000 needed to pay for the powered exoskeleton called the ReWalk. [AP](#)

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GLOBAL

Changes coming for health care in China and Cuba

14 December - Two countries that are models of effective public health intervention, China and Cuba, have recently embarked on important policy changes, leaving some experts wondering whether citizens will be left worse off. In September, Cuba and the Obama administration began moving closer to normalized relations, which may expose Cuba's vaunted medical system to powerful new market pressures. In October, China renounced its one-child policy, under which most families were forbidden to have more than a single child. Both countries enshrine health care as a fundamental right. [The New York Times](#)

High dose chloroquine can be used for treatment of chloroquine resistant *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria

11 December - Due to development of multidrug resistant *Plasmodium falciparum* new antimalarial therapies are needed. ... Adequate clinical and parasitological responses were 14%, 38%, and 39% after standard dose and 66%, 84%, and 91% after double dose chloroquine in children aged <5, 5-9 and 10-14 years and infected with *P. falciparum* with

**Zombie infections:
epidemiology,
treatment, and
prevention**

In *The BMJ*, Tara C Smith summarises the epidemiology and pathology of zombie infections and calls for research and funding to prevent a zombie apocalypse.

Each year, the British Medical Journal puts out a humorous Christmas issue.



chloroquine resistance conferring genotypes. ... Chloroquine resistance is dose dependent and can be overcome by higher still well tolerated doses. [The Journal of Infectious Diseases](#)

Myanmar confirms two circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus cases, 6 new WPV cases in Pakistan

13 December - In a follow-up to a report two weeks ago, two cases of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus were confirmed in Myanmar this past week, according to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). ... Significant immunization gaps remain in Myanmar, with an estimated 24% of children un- or under-immunized. Vaccination coverage remains particularly low among special at-risk populations. ... In other polio news, six new wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) cases were reported in the past week: four in Sindh province, one in Balochistan province, and one in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). The total number of WPV1 cases for 2015 is now 49, compared to 275 by this time in 2014. In 2015, wild poliovirus transmission is at the lowest levels ever, with fewer cases reported from fewer areas of fewer countries than ever before. In 2015 so far, 66 wild poliovirus cases have been reported from two countries (Pakistan and Afghanistan), compared to 324 cases from nine countries during the same period in 2014. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Ovarian cancer: Screening may cut deaths by a fifth

17 December - Doctors say there is now "encouraging" evidence that an annual blood test may cut ovarian cancer deaths by a fifth. Ovarian tumours are often deadly as they are caught too late. A 14-year study on 200,000 women, published in the *Lancet*, has been welcomed as a potentially landmark moment in cancer screening. But the researchers and independent experts say it is still too soon to call for mass screening because of concerns about the analysis. [BBC News](#)

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INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 48

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity increased to low or moderate levels in many states.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal across EUCOM with the exception of Italy which had low activity.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal throughout PACOM, with the exception of Japan which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Both show minimal influenza activity.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity in Honduras increased from minimal to low.

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

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.

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 5 December 2015 (Week 48):

- Influenza-like illness activity has increased significantly since the last report. All positive influenza A specimens reported during week 48 were among the non-active duty population.
- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 48 were 49% higher than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: No hospitalized influenza cases were reported to APHC(P) through DRSI in week 48. Three hospitalized cases have been reported to date this season.
- Viral specimens: During week 48, 96 of 834 (12%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-A, RHC-C, and RHC-P reported the most influenza A–positive specimens (2 each), followed by RHC-E and CENTCOM which each reported 1 specimen. This was CENTCOM’s first positive report for the season. [APHC](#)

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

During week 48 (November 29 – December 5, 2015), influenza activity increased slightly in the United States but remained low overall.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 48 was influenza A viruses, with influenza A (H3) viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories was low.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below their system-specific epidemic threshold in both the NCHS Mortality Surveillance System and the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System. [CDC](#)

Early vaccination tied to fewer flu symptoms for health workers

11 December - For health care providers, earlier influenza vaccination is linked to fewer flu symptoms and less time away from work, a Mexican study suggests. ... [Dr. Adrian] Camacho-Ortiz and colleagues analyzed data on nearly 6,200 health care workers over two flu seasons at one teaching hospital in Mexico. ... [During] the first year of the study, only 23 percent of vaccinated workers were inoculated by the beginning of November, two months into the flu season. In the second year, 56 percent of the vaccinated workers were inoculated by November. ... Fewer workers vaccinated early during the first year translated into more leaves of absence among the study participants – 52 the first year, compared with just 15 the following year – and more total days of lost work – 218 versus 68. In the first year, 49 vaccinated workers experienced flu like symptoms, compared with just 24 the following year. There wasn’t a difference, however, in the proportion of vaccinated workers who had confirmed cases of influenza. [Reuters](#)

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ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 49/2015 (30 November–6 December)

- Influenza activity across the WHO European Region was at a low level in all 42 countries reporting for week 48/2015, while 20 countries reported sporadic geographic spread.
- All seasonal influenza viruses (A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2), B/Victoria and Yamagata lineages were detected sporadically in both sentinel and non-sentinel specimens.

Season

- As usual for this time of year, influenza activity in the European Region remains low, with few influenza viruses detected (4% of sentinel specimens)
- Although few viruses have been subtyped (type A) or ascribed to a lineage (type B), A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses were detected more frequently than A(H3N2) and B/Victoria lineage more frequently than B/Yamagata in both sentinel and non-sentinel specimens. All characterised viruses matched the vaccine-strains, although B/Victoria vaccine strains are only included in tetravalent vaccines.

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

France reports new bird flu strain as outbreak spreads

16 December - France has detected the first cases of low pathogenic H5N3 bird flu and found more cases of highly infectious strains in an outbreak of the disease in the southwest of the country. Three cases of H5N3 bird flu were found at three different farms in the southwest, the French agriculture ministry said in a report posted by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on Wednesday. The French farm ministry said the strain found in two farms in the Landes department and one in the Pyrenees-Atlantiques were found in a nationwide surveillance campaign following other outbreaks in the region. ... The emergence of three different highly pathogenic strains in such a short time is unprecedented, the OIE said last week, adding that one hypothesis was that low pathogenic strains had evolved into high pathogenic ones. [Thomas Reuters Foundation](#)

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For 2015 Week 49 (through 12 December 2015):

- Influenza: No new cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at Fort Benning, Fort Leonard Wood, and Lackland AFB.

[Naval Health Research Center](#)

Study shows value of two-dose flu vaccine priming in young kids

15 December - Children who received two doses of flu vaccine during a previous flu season were better protected against the H3N2 and B strains of influenza, according to a study last week in *The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*. ... They found that in both seasons and

against H3N2 and B influenza illness separately, VE point estimates were consistently higher for children who had received two doses in the same prior season than for those who had not (VE range of 58% to 80% vs. 33% to 44%, respectively). ... The investigators also noted that children who were immunized in the previous season but missed their flu vaccination in the study season appeared to benefit from residual protection of the earlier flu shot. Flu VE in that group was about 40%. [CIDRAP Flu Scan](#) (second item)

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

For 29 November - 12 December 2015 (Surveillance Weeks 48 & 49): A total of 190 specimens were collected and received from 47 locations. Results were finalized for 134 specimens from 43 locations. During Week 48, two influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and two influenza B were identified. During Week 49, four influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and two influenza B were identified. [US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

WHO: Influenza Update

14 December - Globally, influenza activity generally remained low in both hemispheres. ... The WHO GISRS laboratories tested more than 52160 specimens [from 16-29 November 2015]. 1615 were positive for influenza viruses, of which 1162 (72%) were typed as influenza A and 453 (28%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 408 (42.7%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 548 (57.3%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 182 (74.9%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 61 (25.1%) to the B-Victoria lineage. [WHO](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

120 Multistate outbreaks: Tip of iceberg in food-borne infection

14 December - According to an analysis published in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report last month, there were 120 multi-state outbreaks of food-borne infection from 2010-14 — an average of one every two weeks. Every state in the country has been affected, along with Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, and the outbreaks led to 7,929 illnesses, 1,460 hospitalizations and 66 deaths. Fruits, vegetable row crops like lettuce, beef and sprouts were the main sources. But seeded vegetables, dairy products, chicken, fish, eggs and turkey have all been contaminated. Imported foods accounted for only 18 of the outbreaks, so experts did not blame poor hygiene in foreign countries. ... Over the five-year period, the C.D.C. reported 4,163 cases of food-borne disease outbreaks, or an average of

more than two a day. More than 71,000 people were sickened, 4,247 were hospitalized, and 118 died. [The New York Times](#)

Amidst *E.coli* outbreak, Chipotle centralizing cilantro, other ingredients

16 December - In an effort to combat the *E. coli* outbreak that has sickened dozens nationwide and led to the closing of some locations, Chipotle will begin cutting, chopping, and sealing ingredients in one central Chicago kitchen, then shipping them to its restaurants. *The Wall Street Journal* reports the Mexican food chain had moved away from a central kitchen in favor of having staff chop up tomatoes, cilantro, and other ingredients at individual locations. However, the move from locally-sourced and chopped ingredients back to the centralized location, it is thought, could allow the Denver-based company to keep a tighter rein on sanitary procedures. [WTOP](#)

USDA lists steps to improve poultry, ground beef safety

14 December - The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced steps on two different fronts to curb foodborne illnesses. ... The draft guidance for poultry producers is the USDA's first since 2010 and covers science-based interventions for limiting *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* at all steps in poultry production, from farm through processing. ... It pinpoints problem areas and outlines best practices. For example, the guidance points out several stages during production at which organic material can build up, which can pose a cross-contamination threat. The report also offers steps to counter the contamination, such as plastic sleeves for employees handling the carcasses and ample water and washing stations for cleaning knives. ... In another food safety development, the FSIS today announced a finalized rule that requires all makers of raw ground beef to keep adequate records of source material, so the agency can quickly find the contaminated source during the trace-back part of outbreak investigations. [CIDRAP](#)

U.S. hogs fed pig remains, manure to fend off deadly virus return

14 December - Animal-nutritionist John Goihl knows Minnesota farmers who feed the remains of dead baby pigs to hogs used for breeding in attempts to ward off infections of a deadly virus in offspring. In Oklahoma, farm workers are mixing manure from swine sick with the disease, known as Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus (PEDv), into the food of healthy animals to build their immunity. ... U.S. pork producers are doing whatever they can to shore up their herds' defenses against the virus that killed up to 8 million pigs, a tenth of the nation's herd, two years ago, and that farmers fear could return this winter. ... Feedback allows female hogs to become infected and pass on immunity to piglets, which are more likely to die from the disease than older hogs. Those fed infected food or otherwise exposed to the virus usually become sick for a few days, but then get well again. Purposefully exposing hogs to the virus is "really important because that's one way we can have local establishment and local building of immunity," said Lisa Becton, director of swine health

information and research for the National Pork Board, an industry group. [Reuters](#)

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WELLNESS

Drinking coffee tied to lower risk of death

17 December - In a 10-year U.S. study, people who drank coffee regularly were less likely to die of many causes, including heart disease and diabetes, than those who didn't drink coffee at all. The more coffee study participants consumed, the lower their risk of dying, and decaf drinkers showed a similar pattern. ... The researchers used data from a previous study on 90,317 adults without cancer or history of cardiovascular disease who were followed from 1998 through 2009. ... By 2009, about 8,700 people had died. After accounting for other factors like smoking, the researchers found that coffee drinkers were less likely to have died during the study than nondrinkers. The risk of death was lowest for those who drank four to five cups of coffee per day. A similar association was seen among drinkers of decaffeinated coffee as well. [Reuters](#)

How exercise may help us fight off colds



16 December - Working out could help us fight off colds and other infections, according to a timely new study. The study, which found that regular exercise strengthens the body's immune system in part by repeatedly stressing it, was conducted in animals. ... In broad terms, our immune system reacts to invading microbes through a variety of cells. Some of these cells don't directly combat the infection, but instead promote the development of inflammation. When we think of inflammation, we usually think of fever, swelling and redness. But inflammation can also be a good thing, helping the body to heal itself as it fights invading microbes. The problem is that inflammation can easily get out of hand. If the inflammatory response to an infection or injury is too robust or indiscriminate, the inflammation can ultimately cause more tissue damage and lingering health problems than it prevents. [The New York Times](#)

Liquor taxes and sexually transmitted infections

17 December - Maryland increased its liquor taxes in 2011 and a sharp decrease in the rate of new gonorrhea infections immediately followed. Researchers have determined that the two events are closely linked. The study, in *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, used three control groups to exclude other explanations for the decline. ... In 2011, the Maryland liquor tax rose to 9 percent from 6 percent. After the increase, Maryland's

gonorrhoea rate declined by 24 percent — the equivalent of 1,600 cases per year. There was no decrease in the control states. The authors suggest that decreased alcohol consumption decreases sexual risk-taking, including unprotected sex, casual sex and sex with new partners. [The New York Times](#)

Pinterest, Facebook and health issues: New studies

13 December - Despite the large number of posts on visual social media platforms that suggest—and fuel—depressing or suicidal thoughts, there aren't many for users to read and share that would help them cope with their mental state more proactively, a University of Georgia study finds. ... When analyzing these posts, Jin said there was a lack of specific coping strategies to balance out pins that suggest depressing thoughts. The study also found few health professionals and health public relations practitioners addressing the issue of depression on Pinterest. ... Among the key findings of the [second] study: Students with a history of childhood physical abuse were found to have more densely interconnected groups of Facebook friends, patterns associated with higher risk for alcohol use and problems. [Outbreak News Today](#)

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USAFRICOM

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Cholera outbreak in DRC nears 20,000

15 December - The Ministry of Health of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has notified WHO of ongoing outbreaks of cholera across the country. Although the overall trend is decreasing, there are still areas reporting a high number of cases. Since the beginning of the year, 19,705 cases have been reported in DRC. As of 29 November, the following provinces had reported cases: South Kivu (4,906), ex-Katanga (4,565), Maniema (3,971), North Kivu (3,294) and ex-Oriental (2,969). A high number of cases are still reported in the province of South Kivu where the situation is particularly worrying because of the presence of camps hosting refugees from Burundi. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Ebola in West Africa tied to less bleeding than in earlier outbreaks

14 December - The incidence of hemorrhagic symptoms in the current West Africa has been much lower than in previous outbreaks elsewhere in Africa, a phenomenon that has been noted previously, according to a new meta-analysis in *BMC Infectious Diseases*. ... The researchers found that the incidence of gingival bleeding was 18.0% in West Africa, compared with 45.3% farther east. Incidence of nasal and conjunctival bleeding was 1.3%

and 1.9%, respectively, in West Africa, compared with 10.6% and 24.2%, respectively, in East-Central Africa. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

Liberia: Female survivor may be cause of Ebola flare-up in Liberia

17 December - An outbreak of Ebola in Liberia months after the country was declared free of the virus could have stemmed from a survivor who became infectious again after her immune system was weakened by pregnancy, experts investigating the case said. The theory being discussed by U.S. and Liberian researchers and the World Health Organization raises concerns about whether it will be possible to bring to an end the worst Ebola epidemic in history, with as many as 17,000 survivors in West Africa acting as a potential human reservoir of the virus. Ebola can lie dormant and hide in parts of the body such as the eyes and testicles, and rare cases of the virus re-emerging have been reported before. If proven, the Liberia case would be the first known example of such a patient transmitting the virus to others. [Reuters](#)

Sudan reports 130 dengue related deaths in 3 months

11 December - According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), a total of 557 suspected dengue fever cases, including 130 deaths, were reported in Sudan between 29 August (when the outbreak started) and 4 December. The outbreak had initially affected Darfur but has now spread to Kassala and Kordofan states. According to the MoH, 53 per cent of all reported cases are male and the age group 5 to 14 years has the highest number of cases (45 per cent). ... In response, the WHO has sent an epidemiologist to support the MoH in investigation and outbreak response. WHO and the MoH are also preparing to deploy a mini-lab from the Institut Pasteur, Dakar, together with a team of laboratory experts to support field diagnosis and strengthen the capacity of the central public health laboratory in Khartoum. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Tanzania: Dar es Salaam reports more than 4,500 cholera cases

12 December - Tanzania's cholera outbreak, which began in late August 2015, has progressively spread to more than half of country's regions, affecting thousands of people. Months into the response, local capacities and resources are overstretched; prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to classify the outbreak an organization-wide priority, enabling it to deploy additional resources to contain the disease's spread. As of 8 December, 10 412 cases and 159 deaths have been reported in 21 of the country's 30 regions. Dar es Salaam, the commercial capital with a population of 4.4 million, accounts for 44% of all people who have contracted cholera. [Outbreak News Today](#)

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Egypt: Curing hepatitis C, in an experiment the size of Egypt

15 December - ... Six million Egyptians were infected with hepatitis C by unsterile needles during the country's decades-long fight against schistosomiasis. The virus spread insidiously; today, at least 10 percent of Egyptians, nearly nine million people, are chronically infected, the highest rate in the world. But a grand experiment unfolding across the country may change all that. [Pharmaceutical] companies are [making] a complicated deal to sell hepatitis drugs at a fraction of their usual cost while imposing tight restrictions intended to protect lucrative markets in the West. ... [The] arrangement in Egypt may serve as a blueprint not just for curing hepatitis around the world, but also for providing other cutting-edge medicines to citizens in poor countries who could never afford them.

[The New York Times](#)

Iran: Swine flu toll up by 15, reached 57

15 December - An outbreak of swine flu has claimed 57 lives since mid-November in Iran, where hundreds of people have been diagnosed with the virus, the health ministry said Tuesday. "Around 900 patients have been diagnosed with the H1N1 flu virus across the country," the head of the ministry's communicable diseases department, Mohammad Mehdi, told AFP. He said 57 patients have died, 15 higher than the last death toll announced on December 10. The deaths from the H1N1 virus have been mostly in southeastern Iran: 33 were recorded in Kerman and five in Sistan-Baluchistan provinces. [Yahoo! News](#)

Iraq: Squeezed by budget and Islamic State, Iraqi health system struggles

15 December - Iraq's prime minister responded to protests this summer over failing public services by launching a campaign against corruption and mismanagement, yet more than four months later there is little sign of improvement in one key sector: healthcare. With Iraqis fleeing Islamic State in ever greater numbers, the country's growing population of internal refugees is straining public facilities. ... The World Health Organization says Iraq's public health, water, and sanitation systems are collapsing.... [Thousands] of Iraqis forced to flee Anbar province in the west have opted to bypass the government and seek medical care from non-governmental organizations such as one called Dari. [Reuters](#)

Saudi Arabia: MERS infects another healthcare worker

16 December - Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health (MOH) today reported a MERS-CoV case, the country's first in 15 days. The case, from Buraidah, is likely linked to another recent case from the same location. The latest patient is a healthcare worker who contracted the virus in a healthcare setting. ... The new case lifts the country's total from Middle East respiratory

syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) to 1,280 cases, 550 of them fatal.

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

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USEUCOM

Colistin-resistance gene MCR-1 noted in UK, another Danish patient

16 December - MCR-1, the recently identified gene that disables the last-line antibiotic colistin, has now been identified in the United Kingdom and in another patient in Denmark, according to a post yesterday on Germination, a *National Geographic* public health, food, and disease blog. The gene was first identified in China, as noted in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* on Nov 18, then noted in Malaysia and Portugal. On Dec 3 Danish scientists reported it one patient and in five samples of imported poultry meat.

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

United Kingdom: NHS hooks up with dating app Tinder on organ donations

14 December - The NHS has partnered with dating app Tinder to raise awareness about organ donations. The app is used to find people a good personality match but for the next fortnight it will also encourage users to become a donor. People who swipe on some pictures on the app will be encouraged to sign up to the NHS organ donor register. ... In July, NHS Blood and Transplant reported that the number of people in the UK donating organs after death had fallen for the first time in more than a decade. ... Tinder has created bespoke profiles for some of its more high-profile members. ... The celebrities' Tinder profiles will feature The Wait logo to draw attention to the importance of organ donations. Users who swipe right will match with these profiles and receive a message that says: "If only it was that easy for those in need of a life-saving organ to find a match." [BBC News](#)

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USNORTHCOM

Canada: Guidance issued for treating Syrian refugees

17 December – Syrian refugees forcibly displaced by the civil war have faced war crimes, human rights violations, poverty, and prolonged displacement, all of which can have

physical and mental health implications. Now, doctors in Canada have developed a list of recommendations that can guide their medical evaluation and care. ... The program includes an evidence-based health assessment and the integration of the refugees into the health system. Besides medical considerations, empathy, reassurance, and advocacy are key clinical elements for the recovery process of these refugees. [MedPage Today](#)

U.S.: America's 'third wave' of asbestos disease upends lives

17 December - ... The fire-resistant mineral first had killed asbestos miners, millers and manufacturing workers. Then it had taken out insulators, shipbuilders and others who worked with asbestos products. Eventually, ... it would be roused from its dormant state in pipes, ceiling tiles and automobile brakes and kill again. ... The takeaway, he said, was that "in-place asbestos was going to pose a continuing danger to millions of workers and to the general public." The Environmental Protection Agency has banned some, but not all, asbestos products in the United States; 400 metric tons of the mineral were consumed in 2014. ... Jesse Davis, a safety coordinator for the Communication Workers of America union, says telecommunications workers nationwide are at risk of exposures. ... "We're finding more and more where asbestos-containing conduit exists," Davis said. "Every manhole they go in, they should be asking about the presence of asbestos." [The New York Times](#)

U.S.: CDC issues travel notices for several countries due to Zika virus

10 December - With the presence of autochthonous, or locally transmitted Zika virus infection in nine countries in South and Central America and Mexico in 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued travel notices for people traveling to the following countries: Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay, Suriname and Venezuela today. ... CDC recommends that travelers to these countries protect themselves from mosquito bites. [Outbreak News Today](#)

U.S.: CDC proposes updated guidelines for opioid prescribing

16 December - The CDC has proposed 12 recommendations for clinicians prescribing opioids. Among them: When initiating opioid therapy, immediate-release opioids at the lowest effective doses are recommended. Extra precautions should be taken when prescribing at or above 50 morphine milligram equivalents (MME) per day, and doses at or above 90 MME per day generally should be avoided. For treatment of acute, nontraumatic pain unrelated to major surgery, opioids usually should not be prescribed for more than 3 days. For patients with chronic pain, clinicians should discuss the benefits and harms of continued opioid treatment with patients at least every 3 months. Providers should use their state's prescription drug monitoring program to review the patient's history of controlled substance prescriptions when starting opioids for chronic pain and at least every 3 months

during treatment. Urine testing should be performed before initiation and at least annually thereafter. Clinicians should avoid prescribing opioids for patients receiving benzodiazepines. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

U.S.: Denial of sick leave for restaurant workers in the U.S. comes at too high a cost

16 December - ... The CDC estimates that 70% of norovirus outbreaks are caused by food contaminated by infected food workers. ... The FDA mandates that food workers who are ill must notify their manager; in turn, managers must preclude workers with symptoms of diarrhea, jaundice or vomiting from all work areas. A recent study by the CDC found that although three-quarters of restaurants reviewed had sick worker policies, about a third were incomplete. The same study found that most managers left their workers to make their own decision to work, which 80% did while experiencing illness—10% worked while suffering nausea and other symptoms of gastrointestinal illness. The US is the only one among 22 developed Western nations that does not require any paid sick days for its workers. American food workers, who often receive minimal wages, do not disclose their symptoms to avoid losing pay or to avoid encumbering their co-workers when replacements are not available at hand. [Outbreak News Today](#)

U.S.: Drug use trends remain stable or decline among teens

16 December - The 2015 Monitoring the Future survey (MTF) shows decreasing use of a number of substances, including cigarettes, alcohol, prescription opioid pain relievers, and synthetic cannabinoids ("synthetic marijuana"). Other drug use remains stable, including marijuana, with continued high rates of daily use reported among 12th graders, and ongoing declines in perception of its harms. The MTF survey measures drug use and attitudes among eighth, 10th, and 12th graders, and ... has been conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor since 1975. For the first time, daily marijuana use exceeds daily tobacco cigarette use among 12th graders. Daily marijuana use for this group remained relatively stable at 6 percent, compared to 5.5 percent reporting daily cigarette smoking (down from 6.7 percent in 2014). [NIH](#)

U.S.: Ebola has long-term consequences for U.S. survivors

Of the 10 people treated for Ebola in the U.S., eight survived and all had some symptoms in the weeks and months after they recovered, CDC researchers said. ... The eight had a range of symptoms after recovery, Epstein said, some of which were severe enough to require re-admission to hospital. Most improved or went away over time, but only one survivor said all symptoms had completely resolved. Six of the eight said they were able to return to normal daily activities within 8 weeks of discharge. The most frequently reported symptoms were:

- Lethargy or fatigue, reported by six people as being present at discharge and lasting for

several weeks. ...

- Arthralgia, also reported by six people as being present at discharge and lasting for weeks. ... Sites included knees, shoulder, lower back, and heel.
- Alopecia, also suffered by six people. [MedPage Today](#)

U.S.: Flint, Michigan declares state of emergency amid lead in drinking water scare

15 December - In trying to solve one water crisis, the city of Flint, Michigan, has inadvertently created a newer, even bigger one — and it's coming at the cost of children's health. Now, after tests have shown elevated lead levels in the blood of some local children, the mayor of Flint has declared a state of emergency to pave the way for possible government disaster aid. ... Flint switched from Detroit's water system last year to the Flint River as part of a cost-cutting move. ... But residents complained about the taste, smell and appearance of the water. Officials maintained the water met safety standards, but children were later found to have elevated lead levels in their blood and it was determined that corrosive river water was drawing lead from aging underground pipes. Flint returned to Detroit's system in October, but the damage was apparently done. [NBC News](#)

U.S.: Nurse with tuberculosis may have exposed over 1,000, including 350 infants

13 December - Over 1,000 people, including 350 infants, may have been exposed to tuberculosis in the maternity wing of a hospital in California after an active case of the disease was diagnosed in a nurse, hospital officials said on Sunday. The Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose, Calif., said it was notified in mid-November that an employee who worked "in the area of the newborn nursery" had been given the diagnosis, with the potential to infect hospital staff and patients, including the newborns. ... Hospital officials said they had identified all patients, staff members and visitors who might have been exposed, and were contacting each one. Dr. Stephen Harris, the chairman of pediatrics at the hospital, said in a statement that the risk of infection remained low but that "the consequences of a tuberculosis infection in infants can be severe." He said the hospital would begin offering preventive treatment to the exposed infants "as soon as possible." [The New York Times](#)

U.S.: Outbreak prevention report card - half of states score 50%

17 December - If states were graded like schoolchildren on their programs and policies on infectious disease prevention, most would get C's or worse and none would get an A, suggested a report issued Thursday from the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. ... It assigned numerical scores of 0 to 10 based on the following indicators, awarding one point for efforts and policies deemed adequate in each category. ... Overall, 28 states and the District of Columbia received scores of 5 or less. The

best was a score of 8, given to Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, New York, and Virginia.

[MedPage Today](#)

U.S.: Using citizen science to assess Chagas disease entomological risk in Texas

10 December - ... We created a kissing bug citizen science program in Texas to educate the public about Chagas disease, a vector-borne disease of humans and dogs, and to create a mechanism for the public to submit triatomine 'kissing bug' vectors to our research program. From May 2013 to December 2014, we designed an interactive website, distributed pamphlets, and responded to emails and phone calls from the public. This resulted in the submission of 1,980 kissing bugs, mostly collected from dog kennels and outdoor patios, expanding the geographic regions known to harbor kissing bugs in Texas and allowing insight into a cross-section of bugs of high epidemiological and veterinary relevance. Citizen submissions of kissing bugs peaked in June-July and showed 63.3% infection prevalence with *Trypanosoma cruzi*. [PLOS | Neglected Tropical Diseases](#)

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USPACOM

Australia: Court pulls Nurofen products from market

15 December - The maker of the popular painkiller Nurofen was ordered on Monday to remove some of its brands from store shelves in Australia. The Federal Court ruled that UK-based drug giant Reckitt Benckiser made misleading claims about the pills' effectiveness. The court said Nurofen's back pain, period pain, migraine pain and tension headache brands were identical to standard Nurofen - despite being nearly double the price. ... [The] court found all the products contained the same amount of the active ingredient: 342 milligrams of ibuprofen lysine. [Al Jazeera](#)

Lao People's Democratic Republic: Circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus

15 December - On 8 December 2015, the National IHR Focal Point of Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) notified WHO of 2 additional VDPV1 cases. These cases are from Xaisomboun, a previously unaffected province. To date, the total number of confirmed cVDPV1 cases in this outbreak is 5. [WHO](#)

Malaysia deforestation linked to human cases of monkey malaria

17 December - Deforestation in Malaysia and the changes it causes to the environment are

highly likely to be to blame for a steep rise in human cases of a type of malaria usually found in monkeys, scientists said on Thursday. The mosquito-borne disease, known as Plasmodium knowlesi malaria, is common in forest-dwelling macaque monkeys and was only recently found for the first time in people, the scientists said in a study of the issue. Yet with widespread deforestation alongside rapid oil palm and other agricultural expansion, the disease has now become the most common form of human malaria in many areas of Malaysia, they said, and has been reported across southeast Asia. [Reuters](#)

Thailand: Dengue cases surpass 130,000, Health ministry calls for cooperation from other agencies

16 December - The number of dengue fever cases increase by 2,000 in the past week in Thailand with the country cumulative total now eclipsing 130,000 (131,647 cases). In addition, four more dengue fatalities were reported with the death tally now at 129.

[Outbreak News Today](#)

Thailand's remote lifesavers

11 December - Nearly half of the world's population lives in rural areas, but only a quarter of the world's doctors serve them. About 40 years ago, Thailand's government introduced an ambitious programme to provide healthcare to its 34 million rural population. In exchange for the state paying their tuition fees, young Thai medics are obliged to spend their first three years as qualified doctors working wherever the government feels they are needed. ... Since Thailand's health plan was introduced four decades ago, the infant mortality rate has fallen from 7 percent to just 1 percent and it is now three times lower than the regional average. The country has become a global leader in the fight against malaria, having cut related infections and deaths by 90 percent. [Al Jazeera](#)

U.S.: Hawaii dengue fever update, CDC interim report released

17 December - The Hawaii State Department of Health (HDOH) reported Wednesday four additional dengue fever cases on Big Island, bringing the total cases to 157. Health officials report of the 157, seven are still potentially infectious. The cases further breakdown as follows: 140 are Hawaii Island residents and 17 are visitors. 123 cases have been adults; 34 have been children. On Tuesday, the HDOH released the Interim Assessment of the Response to the Dengue Outbreak on the Island of Hawaii. ... According to the 10-page report, the response by DOH to the ongoing outbreak has been timely, well considered, and appropriate. ... The report identifies two critical deficiencies that should be urgently addressed: communications and medical entomologic (entomology is the study of insects) capabilities. "Communications capacity at the State Department of Health is inadequate," notes Petersen. [Outbreak News Today](#)

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CDC issues travel notices for several countries due to Zika virus

10 December - With the presence of autochthonous, or locally transmitted Zika virus infection in nine countries in South and Central America and Mexico in 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued travel notices for people traveling to the following countries: Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay, Suriname and Venezuela today. ... CDC recommends that travelers to these countries protect themselves from mosquito bites. The Ministry of Health of Brazil is concerned about a possible association between the Zika virus outbreak and increased numbers of babies born with birth defects. For this reason, pregnant women should take extra precautions to avoid mosquito bites. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Brazil: Suspected microcephaly cases in Brazil rise by 640 in past week

15 December - In the course of one week, the number of suspected microcephaly cases in Brazil has risen by 640, from 1761 to 2401, and appears to be expanding to additional states in the country, the Brazilian Health Ministry reports. The Secretariat of Health Surveillance (SVS), as of Dec. 12, a total of 2,401 suspected cases of microcephaly related to infection by Zika virus have been identified in 549 municipalities in 20 Brazilian states. Of the total reported cases, 2,165 are under investigation, 134 were confirmed and 102 were diagnosed discarded for surveillance. 27 fatalities have been reported. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Outbreak cases of chikungunya increase by 1,400

14 December - Cases of chikungunya in the Americas and Caribbean rose by only 1,432 last week, bringing the outbreak total to 1,789,490, according to a Dec 11 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) update. The agency's previous two updates included 2,556 and 17,398 new cases, respectively, with the latter update including 2 weeks' worth of data. The new infections bring the total this year to 642,721 suspected and confirmed cases. No new deaths were reported, keeping that total at 77. The vast majority of new cases were reported by Colombia, which often has had the most weekly cases this year. ... Mexico was second with 290 new cases and 11,070 for the year. Many countries, however, have not supplied a chikungunya update to PAHO for weeks. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

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