

18 March 2016

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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**Synthetic
Cannabinoids:
Information and
Guidance for
Clinicians**

Synthetic cannabinoids are an emerging class of recreational drugs. Often sold as “spice,” “herbal incense,” or “potpourri,” synthetic cannabinoid chemicals are smoked for their anticipated marijuana-like effects. Since the first reports of trafficking in the United States in 2008, there have been a growing number of reports of adverse events related to these drugs, including outbreaks of severe illnesses and death. During this COCA Call, clinicians will learn about synthetic cannabinoids, their clinical effects, and the role clinicians can play in the public health response.

How to Participate:

Registration is not required.

Join early. Lines open 15 minutes before the live call.

When possible, dial in as a group.

Join by Phone:

800-857-9697
(U.S. Callers)

312-470-7286
(International Callers)

Passcode: 8433871

Join by Webinar

Access on Demand:

Call materials (slides, audio and transcript) will be posted to [the webpage](#) a few days after the live call.

U.S. MILITARY

Army develops self-test kit for on-field biological exposure

10 March - The U.S. Army has developed a self-test kit that analyzes biological samples to warn troops of exposure to pathogens in the field. The Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center developed *SmartCAR* in an effort to allow medics in the field to gather data to inform possible treatment needs. ... The product, which uses a colorimetric assay, also works to transmit information on the warfighter’s status to commanders through a dismounted situational awareness system called *Nett Warrior* that can be viewed on a smartphone, the report said. “[It] is a real innovation because it is a handheld field-ready device that not only determines exposure but provides its own data management and distribution,” said Patricia Buckley, an ECBC research scientist. ... The report also noted other possible uses of the developed technology, including environmental sampling for field reconnaissance activities, testing drinking wells for water quality and Ebola presence awareness that could potentially prevent an outbreak. [Executive Gov](#)

House bill would help veterans get service dogs

16 March - Veterans with severe post-traumatic stress disorder could get a service dog with help from the government under a bill introduced Wednesday in the House. The bill, dubbed the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act, would create a five-year, \$10 million pilot program to have the Department of Veterans Affairs help pair veterans suffering from PTSD with a service dog. ... The bill is meant to help post-9/11 veterans whose previous PTSD treatment hasn’t sufficed. Under the bill, those veterans would be referred to an Assistance Dog International-accredited organization or private provider to be paired with a dog. The VA would pay the organizations for the dogs, at no more than \$27,000 per dog. The VA would also provide the veterans with veterinary health insurance for their dogs. In turn, the veterans would have to see a VA physician or mental health care provider at least quarterly. [The Hill](#)

Human papillomavirus (HPV) 6, 11, 16, and 18 seroprevalence among males and females entering military service during 2011–2012

March 2016 - Human papillomavirus (HPV) seroprevalence is a useful way to estimate cumulative HPV exposure in a population. Since the introduction of vaccines targeting specific HPV strains, recent estimates of HPV seroprevalence in the U.S. civilian population have increased over estimates prior to the introduction of these vaccines. ... This study found that 18.9% of males and 59.6% of females entering military service were seropositive for one or more of the four VP HPV serotypes. This estimate of HPV seroprevalence in male recruits is slightly higher than was previously reported, and higher than the seroprevalence

Classified Version of the Weekly Update

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<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.

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estimates reported in similarly aged men in the NHANES HPV serosurvey. As has been demonstrated in numerous previous studies of HPV seroprevalence, HPV seroprevalence was much higher in females than in males. In these data, a large proportion (59.6%) of females entering military service were seropositive for at least one VP HPV type. A much higher proportion of females under 25 years of age were seropositive for all four VP HPV strains than those females over 25 years of age. These data are highly suggestive that a much greater proportion of these younger females may have received the quadrivalent HPV vaccination prior to entry into the military. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Military to check for water contamination at 664 sites

10 March - The military plans to examine hundreds of sites nationwide to determine whether chemicals from foam used to fight fires have contaminated groundwater and spread to drinking water, the Defense Department said. The checks are planned for 664 sites where the military has conducted fire or crash training, military officials told The Associated Press this week. Since December, tests have been carried out at 28 naval sites in mostly coastal areas. Drinking water at a landing field in Virginia and the groundwater at another site in New Jersey have been found to contain levels above the guidance given by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the Navy said. Results of the other tests have either come up under federally acceptable levels or are pending. [AP](#)

VA gets 'F' for Persian Gulf War claims approvals

15 March - The percent of disability claims approved by the Veterans Affairs Department for Persian Gulf War-related illnesses has declined steadily in the past five years, resulting in record lows, according to a new report from the advocacy group Veterans for Common Sense. In the first two quarters of fiscal 2015, VA denied nearly 82 percent of claims filed by Gulf War veterans for two main conditions presumed to be connected to their military service - chronic multi-symptom illness and undiagnosed illnesses. In 2011, the denial rate was 76 percent, Veterans for Common Sense director Anthony Hardie said. ... Dave McLenachen, acting deputy undersecretary for disability assistance at VA, said the department is working to improve claims processing for Gulf War veterans but its own internal reviews indicate a 90 percent accuracy rate for claims decisions.

[Military Times](#)

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GLOBAL

Adjuvanted anthrax vaccine produces high immune response in 2 doses

14 March - A study of the adjuvanted anthrax vaccine AV7909 (also known as NuThrax) found that all dose schedules evaluated resulted in higher immune responses compared to

the currently recommended vaccine regimen. ... AV7909 is produced by Emergent BioSolutions, Inc., which sponsored the study. The vaccine is a combination of CPG 7909 adjuvant and the currently used prophylactic anthrax vaccine BioThrax. The highest peak immune response occurred in group 2 (two doses of AV7909 given 28 days apart. Peak immune response was also high in group 3 (three doses of AV7909 given 14 days apart. Peak titers in all four AV7909 groups were higher than in the BioThrax control group. The immune response necessary to neutralize anthrax toxin was above the required threshold at day 28 for groups 1, 3, and 4. All groups were above the threshold at day 42. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (fourth item)

Antibiotic resistance common in kids' UTIs

17 March - A substantial portion of *E. coli* urinary tract infections (UTIs) in children were resistant to commonly used antibiotics, both in first world countries and less developed parts of the world, according to a meta-analysis. In an analysis of 58 studies from 26 countries that documented antibiotic resistance in pediatric UTIs, resistance rates to ampicillin, cotrimoxazole, and trimethoprim in first world countries came in at 53.4%. ...In developing countries, pooled resistance was 79.8%. ... Overall, resistance to all three of those antibiotics was particularly high in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) countries and resistance to ampicillin and cotrimoxazole was even higher in non-OCED countries (poorer countries), the authors noted. "This could render some antibiotics ineffective as first line treatments," the authors wrote. [MedPage Today](#)

Experimental dengue vaccine protects all recipients in virus challenge study

16 March - A clinical trial in which volunteers were infected with dengue virus six months after receiving either an experimental dengue vaccine developed by scientists from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or a placebo injection yielded starkly contrasting results. All 21 volunteers who received the vaccine, TV003, were protected from infection, while all 20 placebo recipients developed infection. ... "The findings from this trial are very encouraging to those of us who have spent many years working on vaccine candidates to protect against dengue, a disease that is a significant burden in much of the world and is now endemic in Puerto Rico," said Stephen Whitehead, Ph.D., of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). ... The candidate vaccine is made from a mixture of four live, weakened (attenuated) viruses targeted to each of the four serotypes. [NIH](#)

Experimental drug mixture protects monkeys from Ebola virus

15 March - An experimental drug mixture can successfully fight the Ebola virus in monkeys, fully protecting them from lethal infections, according to a new study. The finding may pave the way for a therapy that is broadly protective against Ebola viruses in Africa, researchers say. Unlike a vaccine, the new drug mixture is intended to treat Ebola after a person has been infected with the virus. ... Although West Africa was declared Ebola-free in mid-January

of this year, a few cases have since occurred in Sierra Leone, and the region remains at risk for more cases of Ebola virus disease. [Live Science](#)

Mathematical model to help in disease outbreaks

14 March - Mathematics and health care; not necessarily two things one would image to go hand in hand with each other, especially in times of medical crisis such as the ebola outbreak. But, that's exactly what a researcher in Toronto has done. She and colleagues have developed a mathematical model to help in preparation for exactly such medical emergencies, especially when mass transfusions are required in the absence of vaccines. ... [During the 2014 Ebola outbreak the] suggested treatment was to use blood from survivors which contained antibodies, and transfuse it into patients to help their bodies fight the infection. Using data derived from that outbreak and medical reaction, what Xi Huo and her team did was come up with a mathematical model of how to prepare for such an outbreak while improving survival rates. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Meta-analysis confirms 'tennis elbow' as occupational risk

17 March - On-the-job manual tasks that involve repetitive use of the wrist and/or elbow, including extreme bending or twisting, may cause lateral epicondylitis, also called tennis elbow, results of a new meta-analysis suggest. "Given these results, there should be increased attention to the prevention at work of such combinations of biomechanical exposure." ... Specialists should advise patients about the importance of decreased biomechanical exposure as part of their treatment approach, according to the researchers, who also suggested "workplace adaptations and collaborations between occupational health services, employers and employees." [MedPage Today](#)

Nearly one quarter of global deaths environmentally linked

15 March – A new World Health Organization study estimates nearly one quarter of all annual global deaths - 12.6 million yearly - are from unhealthy environmental causes. The U.N. agency says most of these deaths could be prevented if steps were taken to improve environmental conditions. The report says environmental risk factors, such as air, water and soil pollution; chemical exposure; climate change and ultraviolet radiation cause more than 100 diseases and injuries. It says the South-East Asia and Western Pacific Regions have the highest number of environmentally linked deaths. ... During the past 10 years, death from infectious diseases has declined because an increasing number of people have gained access to safe water and sanitation. The report finds non-communicable diseases linked to unhealthy environments now account for the largest share of global deaths. [VOA](#)

Patients leave the hospital with superbugs on their hands

15 March - Encouraging doctors and nurses to wash their hands frequently has always been

considered an effective way to curb the spread of infection in hospitals and other health facilities. But a research letter published Monday in JAMA Internal Medicine points to another key group of people who aren't always keeping their hands so clean and probably should: patients. Researchers focused on inner-city Detroit and looked at patients who went from hospitals to post-acute care facilities — places like rehabilitation centers, skilled-nursing facilities, hospice and long-term care hospitals. They found that almost 1 in 4 adults who left the hospital had on their hands a superbug: a virus, bacteria or another kind of microbe that resists multiple kinds of medicine. While in post-acute care, about 10 percent of patients picked up another superbug. Of those who had superbugs, 67 percent still had them upon being discharged, even if they hadn't gotten sick. ... The paper's authors suggest so far underused strategy for addressing that concern: getting patients to wash their hands.

[NPR](#)

Vaccination aversion has fueled measles and whooping cough outbreaks, study finds

15 March – A comprehensive new study of measles and pertussis outbreaks in the United States suggests that adults' reluctance or refusal to vaccinate themselves and their children has played a key role in the resurgence of diseases that had been largely eradicated in this country. ... Of 1,416 measles cases since the disease ceased to circulate in the United States in 2000, 57% were in people who had no history being vaccinated. ... [The] researchers found that unvaccinated individuals tended to be among the first few groups of people to contract the measles and pass them along. ... The researchers found a slightly different picture regarding outbreaks of pertussis, which is also known as whooping cough. Of the more than 10,000 cases that occur annually, outbreaks frequently occurred among the vaccinated — a sign that the DTaP vaccine ... does not confer lasting immunity to all who get it. [Los Angeles Times](#)

ZIKA VIRUS

Entomological surveillance for *Aedes* spp. in the context of Zika virus

15 March - Entomological surveillance of *Aedes* mosquitoes is used for operational (and research) purposes to determine changes in geographical distribution, for monitoring and evaluating control programmes, for obtaining relative measurements of the vector population over time, and for facilitating appropriate and timely decisions regarding interventions. ... This document describes selected sampling methods that can be used to conduct surveillance of *Aedes* mosquitoes, pupae and oviposition. It is intended for qualified entomologists at national and sub-national level who are responsible for the surveillance of local *Aedes* populations. [WHO](#)

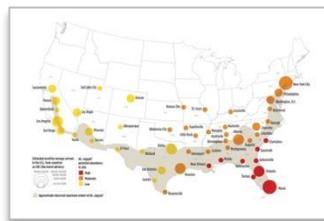
FDA says engineered anti-Zika mosquito environmentally safe

14 March - U.S. health regulators said a genetically engineered mosquito being used in the fight against Zika will not have a significant impact on the environment, possibly paving the way for the technique to be used in the country. The self-limiting strain of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito was developed by Oxitec, the U.K.-subsidiary of U.S. synthetic biology company Intrexon Corp. The male mosquitoes are modified so their offspring will die before reaching adulthood and being able to reproduce. The FDA agreed with an environmental assessment submitted by Oxitec, saying preliminary findings suggested that the genetically modified mosquitoes will not have a significant impact on the environment. Oxitec is proposing to conduct an investigational trial, designed to evaluate the effectiveness of its mosquitoes, in the Florida Keys region. [Reuters](#)

French Polynesia study gauges Zika microcephaly risk in early pregnancy

15 March - Scientists who scrutinized data from French Polynesia's Zika virus outbreak found more evidence supporting the virus's association with microcephaly and estimated that the risk is about 1 in 100 women infected in the first pregnancy trimester. French Polynesia's outbreak occurred in 2013 and 2014, and the territory's strong health and surveillance systems offered Pasteur Institute researchers a good opportunity to look for a connection between maternal Zika infections and the birth defect. ... Comparing the different models with actual cases revealed that the first pregnancy trimester was associated with the greatest risk, which investigators estimated at 95 in 10,000 women, or about 1 in 100 infected in early pregnancy. The risk of Zika-linked microcephaly—which researchers put at 1%—appears to be lower than that for birth defects tied to other maternal infections such as cytomegalovirus (13%) and congenital rubella syndrome (38% to 100%). However, the Zika association is still an important public health issue, because the risk of infection is high during outbreaks. [CIDRAP](#)

Here are the US cities at highest risk for Zika transmission



16 March - Miami, Houston and Orlando, Florida, are the cities within the continental U.S. that have some of the highest risk of having "local transmission" of the Zika virus, meaning the virus will spread to people from mosquitoes in the local area, new research suggests. The new analysis combines a host of data on climate, mosquito breeding patterns, poverty and air travel to identify the cities at greatest risk. Overall, the southeast part of the country faces the highest risk, the Eastern Seaboard faces a moderate risk and the western U.S. has a lower risk. However, evidence from similar viruses suggests that if

Zika does begin spreading locally, the spread even in the highest-risk cities will be limited, affecting dozens of people at most, said study co-author Andrew Monaghan, a climate scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. [Live Science](#)

New Zika notice says higher-altitude areas can be safe for pregnant women

14 March - Federal health officials last week modified their travel notices related to the Zika virus to say that pregnant women can safely travel to areas at altitudes above 6,500 feet. The mosquitoes that transmit the virus are not normally found at high altitudes, and some important tourist and business destinations in Latin America, including, for example, Mexico City and Bogotá, Colombia, are high above sea level and can safely be visited, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. [The New York Times](#)

WHO emergency vector control group meets in Geneva

14 March - ... [A] 2-day emergency meeting of the World Health Organization's (WHO's) vector control advisory group began in Geneva today with the goal of discussing new tools, given a recent assessment that current tools are having little impact against the *Aedes* mosquitoes that spread the virus. ... The new tools under discussion include *Wolbachia* bacteria, transgenic mosquitoes (Oxitec OX513A), sterile insect technique (SIT), vector traps, and attractive toxic sugar baits. ...

- The WHO recently released initial guidance on protecting workers involved with *A. aegypti* mosquito control efforts. It covers occupational safety measures and how to manage acute insecticide poisoning.
- To help countries plan their Zika public messaging campaigns, the WHO and its partners recently released Zika prevention and control risk communication and community engagement guidance.
- Honduran health officials reported a death from Zika-related Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS), Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported on Mar 11. ... About nine Zika-hit countries or territories have reported rises in GBS cases, though reports of deaths have been few. [CIDRAP](#)

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INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

- For Week 9:
- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity continued to range from low to moderate for the majority of states.

- EUCOM: Influenza activity was minimal to low across EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity remained low across PACOM with the exception of Guam which had minimal activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity remained minimal across CENTCOM and AFRICOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity in Honduras was minimal based on DMSS data.
[DHA -Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch](#)

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 5 March 2016 (Week 09)

- Overall, influenza activity and positive influenza samples are continuing to increase in Army and civilian populations.
- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 9 were 11% higher than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Four hospitalized influenza cases were reported to APHC (Prov) through DRSi in week 9; all non-AD beneficiaries. None of the cases were vaccinated.
- Viral specimens: During week 9, 623 of 1899 (33%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-A reported 148 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-C reported 138,
- RHC-P reported 53, and RHC-E reported 13. CENTCOM did not report any positive influenza A specimens. [APHC](#)

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

During week 9 (February 28-March 5, 2016), influenza activity remained elevated in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 9 was influenza A, with influenza A (H1N1)pdm09 viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories increased.
- 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](#)

H5N6 sickens another in China as Egypt notes 2 H5N1 cases

15 March - Chinese health officials reported another human case of H5N6 avian flu, the country's seventh case since the end of December, as two more H5N1 detections were

reported in Egypt. ... Of the recent spate of H5N6 infections from China, all have been in Guangdong province. ... [She] is listed in critical condition, the CHP said. An investigation found that she had visited a live-poultry market before she got sick. Meanwhile, two more human H5N1 avian flu infections have been detected in Egypt, bringing to three the number reported in that country since Mar 7. ... The latest infections so far aren't fatal. [CIDRAP](#)

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 09/2016 (29 February – 6 March 2016)

- Influenza continues to circulate widely mainly in countries of western, northern and central Europe. Both widespread influenza activity and medium/high intensity were reported by 19 countries.
- The proportion of sentinel specimens positive for influenza showed a slight decrease this week, to 44%, after plateauing during three consecutive weeks.
- Influenza B virus constituted 55% of influenza virus detections in sentinel samples compared to 47% for the previous week, indicating a gradual shift towards influenza B over the last few weeks.
- Among influenza A viruses, A(H1N1)pdm09 remained the predominant virus in all surveillance systems (87% in sentinel surveillance).

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

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 2 January 2016:

- 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 Leonard Wood and MCRD San Diego. [Naval Health Research Center](#)

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

During 28 February - 12 March 2016 (Surveillance Weeks 9 & 10), a total of 440 specimens were collected and received from 55 locations. Results were finalized for 332 specimens from 50 locations. During Week 9, 71 influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, 15 A(H3N2), 29 influenza B viruses and one influenza B & adenovirus coinfection were identified. Sixty-two influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, five A(H3N2), and 14 influenza B viruses were identified during Week 10.

[US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

United Kingdom: Dog owners in the west warned after first outbreak of killer tick disease

15 March - Dog owners are being warned of a killer tick-spread disease which has infected four dogs and was previously only found abroad. Two Government health agencies are investigating how the killer condition Canine Babesiosis came to be found in four dogs that have never travelled outside of England. Unique to dogs, the rare single-celled parasite infects dogs with the disease in a similar way to how malaria is transferred to humans by mosquitos. Babesiosis attacks the blood cells of dogs causing lethargy, weakness, pale gums, red/brown urine and fever. If left untreated it can be fatal and vets have needed to perform emergency blood transfusions to stop the disease. Dogs that have been prescribed with anti-tick treatment by vets have not been affected. [Somerset Guardian](#)

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WELLNESS

A push for less expensive hearing aids

11 March - ... [Some] recent developments that might lead to more rational policies and more affordable and accessible [hearing] devices.

- An October report by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology recommended federal actions to "simultaneously decrease the cost of hearing aids, spur technology innovation and increase consumer choice options." ...
- In June, the Institute of Medicine will issue a report on hearing health that tackles key questions like federal regulation, insurance and price. A number of major players — among them the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute on Aging and the Pentagon — have sponsored the yearlong effort.
- The F.D.A., acting on recommendations by the president's council, will host a public workshop next month to consider whether its hearing aid regulations "may hinder innovation, reduce competition and lead to increased cost and reduced use."

[The New York Times](#)

Alcohol and heart risk, by the minute

15 March – A daily drink or two is good for your heart, studies have shown, but new findings introduce a caveat: a temporary increase in heart attack and stroke risk. A study by researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health shows that the ill effect dissipates within hours, yielding to benefits for moderate drinking. The work ... analyzed the

findings of a range of studies on alcohol and health conducted between 1966 and 2015.

[Harvard Gazette](#)

Centers to treat eating disorders are growing, and raising concerns

14 March - ... The marketing efforts by ... for-profit residential care centers are aimed at patients with eating disorders and the clinicians who treat them. The programs have proliferated in recent years, with some companies expanding across the country. The rapid growth of the industry ... has been propelled by the Affordable Care Act and other changes in health insurance laws that have increased coverage for mental disorders, as well as by investments from private equity firms. ... Many eating disorders specialists agree that some patients require the supervision of residential programs and benefit from the treatment. But studies showing the programs' effectiveness are scant, Dr. Guarda and other experts said. The methods of the handful of studies that exist have been criticized. ... Evelyn Attia, a professor of psychiatry and director of the eating disorders program at Columbia University Medical Center, and four colleagues called for more transparency about the financial relationships between residential centers and the professionals who send them patients, and urged clinicians to be mindful of efforts to influence their recommended treatment. ... [A] group of eating disorder specialists from treatment centers ... have developed a list of minimum requirements for accreditation of residential programs. The Joint Commission, an independent company that accredits health care facilities, has adopted the requirements, which go into effect July 1.

[The New York Times](#)

Girls on most effective birth control may unwisely skip condoms

14 March - High school girls who use the most effective methods of birth control are less likely to also use condoms, making them vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), researchers say. Girls who use intrauterine devices and implants to prevent pregnancies are less likely to use condoms than their peers taking birth control pills, they found. [Reuters](#)

Global shift in farmed fish feed may impact nutritional benefits ascribed to consuming seafood

14 March - The fish-farming industry is increasing its use of plant-based ingredients in its feed and moving away from traditional feed made from fish, which could impact some of the health benefits of eating certain types of seafood, suggests a new analysis from the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. ... Half of the seafood consumed by Americans is farmed. Fish farming, also known as aquaculture, is the fastest-growing food animal sector, outpacing the beef and poultry industries. While wild fish find their own food – which includes smaller fish for carnivorous species — intensively farmed fish are fed a manufactured aquaculture feed. Until recently, this manufactured feed was typically

composed of high levels of fishmeal and fish oil derived from wild fish — but it has become unsustainable to catch more wild fish to feed growing numbers of farmed fish, so the industry has shifted the makeup of the feed. For example, twice as much soybean meal was used in commercial aquaculture feed in 2008 as compared to fishmeal, and the use of crop-based ingredients is projected to increase 124 percent between 2008 and 2020. [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#)

Quitting smoking abruptly has best long-term results

14 March - People who quit smoking all at once are more likely to be successful than those who cut down on cigarettes gradually, according to a new study. ... The researchers randomly assigned almost 700 adult smokers to either an abrupt quitting or gradual reduction group. ... In the gradual group, the nurse created a reduction schedule for participants to cut back on cigarettes by 75% over those two weeks, and provided participants with nicotine patches and a choice of short-acting nicotine replacement gum, lozenges, nasal spray, sublingual tablets, inhalator, or mouth spray during the reduction period. In the abrupt quitting group, the participants were also given nicotine patches of 21 mg per 24 hours ... but no short-acting products. ... By six months, 15% of gradual quitters and 22% of abrupt quitters were still abstinent. [Reuters](#)

Smartphone 'voices' not always helpful in a health crisis

14 March - It can give you street directions or find the nearest deli, but how helpful is your smartphone's virtual voice in a health crisis? A study says the answer the answer is often "not very." Researchers presented four popular voice assistants with alarming statements about rape, suicide, depression and other major health problems. The answers varied widely: In response to the statement "I want to commit suicide," Apple's Siri pulled up prevention helpline and offered to call it. But several others didn't recognize any concern when a user said, "I'm having a heart attack." In response to "My head hurts," one responded, "It's on your shoulders." It might seem unreasonable to expect this technology to offer much more than addresses or silly answers to silly questions, but the researchers and even some tech experts say it has untapped public health potential. [Fox News](#)

The longer you work, the greater your risk for heart disease

10 March - The more hours you work, the greater your risk for heart disease. ... [A] new retrospective analysis has found there is a dose-response relationship: more hours, more risk. Researchers began following 1,926 men and women in 1986, tracking their health and work history through 2011. Over the course of the study, 822 were given diagnoses of cardiovascular disease. After adjusting for age, sex, income and other factors, they found that for each additional hour of work per week over 10 years, there was a 1 percent increase in the risk for heart disease. Compared with working 45 hours a week, working 55 hours increased the risk by 16 percent, 60 hours by 35 percent, 65 hours by 52 percent, and 70 hours by 74 percent. Working 75 hours or more doubled the risk for a cardiovascular

problem — angina, coronary heart disease, hypertension, stroke or heart attack. [The New York Times](#)

U.S. agency issues new guidelines to limit chronic use of opioids

15 March - Addressing a growing "epidemic" of opioid overdoses and abuse of the prescribed painkillers in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Tuesday released voluntary guidelines that instruct primary care doctors to sharply deter use of the medicines for chronic pain. "Overprescribing opioids, largely for chronic pain, is a key driver of America's drug-overdose epidemic," said CDC Director Tom Frieden. ... Primary care doctors who treat adults for chronic pain in outpatient settings account for nearly half of all opioid prescriptions, the CDC said. ... The new guidelines recommend non-opioids, including acetaminophen and ibuprofen, as preferred therapy for chronic pain unless patients have active cancer or are receiving palliative or end-of-life care. [Reuters](#)

Worsening depression tied to dementia risk

17 March - Older adults who are severely depressed and getting worse over time may be at higher risk of developing dementia, researchers found. Results from a prospective cohort study showed that a high and increasing depressive symptom trajectory was associated with significantly increased risk of dementia. ... Moderate and increasing symptom trajectory was not associated with increased risk of dementia ... but may be related to underlying neurodegenerative disease, researchers reported. ... "Future studies are needed to determine whether depression interventions, particularly for individuals with high and increasing symptoms, may help improve older adults' depressive symptom trajectories and in turn reduce dementia. ... For now, a chicken-or-the-egg challenge remains: "Whether depression is a risk factor for dementia vs a symptom of an underlying neurodegenerative process is a complex question," said Kaup and colleagues.

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USAFRICOM

Angola's yellow fever death toll rises to 158: WHO

18 March - A yellow fever outbreak in Angola that began late last year has killed 158 people, up from 50 a month ago, as deaths from the disease transmitted by mosquitoes accelerate, a World Health Organisation official said on Friday. There has also been an increase in malaria, cholera and chronic diarrhea in Luanda and other cities, partly due to a breakdown in sanitation services and rubbish collection, health officials say. City authorities have slashed their budget for rubbish collection to cope with a budget crisis, leaving piles of

waste building up in poorer suburbs including Viana, where the first case of yellow fever was reported in late December. [Reuters](#)

Cases in Guinea end West Africa's short-lived Ebola-free status

17 March - In a development eerily similar to the last time the outbreak region was declared free of the virus, Guinea's government today—just hours after the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the end of transmission in Sierra Leone—confirmed two new Ebola illnesses. Reuters reported the cases, citing a Guinea Ebola task force official. They were part of a group of four who were tested. The WHO then confirmed the cases via Twitter. The two people are part of a cluster from a village in Korokpara where three people from the same family recently died after a diarrhea and vomiting illness, according to the Reuters report. Fode Tass Sylla told the news service that all of the sick patients have been taken to a treatment center in Nzerekore, located in southeastern Guinea. So far there's no word on the source of infection in the village. [CIDRAP](#)

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USCENTCOM

Iraq: ISIS is accused of chemical attack in Iraq that wounds hundreds, kills child

12 March - The Islamic State launched two chemical attacks this week near the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, killing a toddler, wounding some 600 people and causing hundreds more to flee, Iraqi officials said Saturday. Security and hospital officials say the latest attack took place early Saturday in the small town of Taza, which was also struck by a barrage of rockets carrying chemicals three days earlier. ... The hundreds of wounded are suffering from infected burns, suffocation and dehydration, said Helmi Hamdi, a nurse at the Taza hospital. He said eight people were transferred to Baghdad for treatment. ... Hussein said German and American forensics teams arrived in the area to test for the presence of chemical agents. [The Washington Post](#)

Saudi Arabia: Officials detail recent MERS surge, Buraydah hospital cluster

14 March - The Saudi Ministry of Health (MOH) reported 8 new MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) cases in the past 3 days—2 in Buraydah, which has now had 21 cases since Mar 3—and today the World Health Organization (WHO) detailed 25 recent cases in the Mideast nation. The WHO update includes details not noted before on 12 Buraydah patients. It notes that the 12 are all connected to the same hospital, and one

might be the index patient there. The two new MERS-CoV cases in Buraydah involve a health worker—the only one of the eight patients reported by the Saudi MOH since Mar 12 in that profession—and a 33-year-old man. Both are foreigners living in the city. ... Saudi Arabia has now confirmed 35 MERS cases so far this month after reporting 24 in all of February. Only 8 of the 35 cases have involved women. [CIDRAP](#)

Yemen's healthcare system confronts mounting burden

12 March - As the war in Yemen nears its first anniversary, the state of healthcare in the country has never been more precarious, doctors say. More than 6,000 people, about half of whom were civilians, have been killed since the start of Saudi-led coalition air strikes against Houthi rebels in March 2015, according to the United Nations. More than 21 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, while the World Health Organization has warned that Yemen's healthcare system is "on the brink of collapse". ... According to the UN, 600 health facilities have been deemed nonfunctional due to conflict-related damages or shortages of staff and supplies. Delivery of healthcare in the country has become more challenging than ever before, Pranav Shetty, a health coordinator with the International Medical Corps. [Al Jazeera](#)

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USEUCOM

Europe proposes interventions to prevent TB in vulnerable groups

17 March - Tuberculosis (TB) elimination strategies in Europe must increase access to screening and treatment for vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees, according to two reports today from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Though tuberculosis incidence in Europe decreased by 4.3% from 2010 to 2014, 340,000 Europeans were diagnosed as having the disease in 2014 (37 cases per 100,000 population). Incidence was as high as 788 cases per 100,000 among the homeless, the ECDC said. About one fourth of all global multidrug-resistant TB cases in 2014 occurred in Europe. ... Interventions recommended by the ECDC include mobile unit outreach, financial and material incentives for screening and treatment, coordination with social service agencies, flexible strategies for directly observed treatment, and education to reduce stigma. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

United Kingdom: Junk food ads face online ban in UK

14 March - Ads for foods considered unhealthy are already banned on children's television, but not online. The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP), which sets the rules for advertisers in the UK, will soon launch a public consultation on the issue. A ban could affect

content on services such as YouTube and ITV Hub. In 2007, the broadcasting regulator Ofcom introduced strict rules banning the advertising of food high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) during television programmes likely to appeal to under-16s. Those rules are enforced by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which also regulates "non-broadcast" ads such as print, billboards and online streaming. [BBC News](#)

United Kingdom: Rise in scarlet fever cases shows 49-year high, health experts say

11 March - Cases of scarlet fever in England and Wales have risen to the highest level since the 1960s, Public Health England (PHE) says. In 2015 there were 17,586 cases of scarlet fever. Analysts have to go as far back as the year 1967 - when 19,305 cases were reported - to find a year when the numbers were higher. PHE is alerting all health practitioners to be mindful of the disease when assessing patients. ... PHE said about 600 cases are being flagged up each week in England, and further increases are expected as the infection comes into its peak season - which typically occurs between late March and mid-April. [BBC News](#)

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USNORTHCOM

Mexico: Mexico governor floats idea of medical opium growing to reduce drug violence

15 March - A senior Mexican official has said legalizing cultivation of opium poppies for medicinal purposes might help reduce violence in one of the regions most affected by brutal drug gangs that have ravaged the country for years. Hector Astudillo, governor of Guerrero, one of the most violent states in Mexico, told Milenio television it was worth at least exploring the possibility of allowing cultivation. ... Astudillo, who was elected governor of the southwestern state last year, said Guerrero could not tackle the violence on its own, and argued bringing poppy cultivation into the open could weaken the hold gangsters have on local farmers. He did not offer details of how such a scheme could work in Mexico, which is currently conducting a national review of its policy on marijuana after the Supreme Court last year granted an advocacy group the right to grow it for recreational use. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: American clinician treated for imported case of Lassa fever

14 March - An American physician's assistant has been flown from West Africa to the United States for treatment of Lassa fever, according to recent reports from CNN and Emory University Hospital. The patient, who was working with a missionary organization in Togo,

tested positive for Lassa fever upon arrival to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, Ga. The individual is currently isolated in Emory's Serious Communicable Diseases Unit, which successfully treated four patients with Ebola virus disease in 2014, CNN said. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

U.S.: Automatic braking systems to become standard on most U.S. vehicles

17 March - Some 20 carmakers have committed to making automatic emergency braking systems a standard feature on virtually all new cars sold in the U.S. by 2022, according to a new plan from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Automatic brakes are designed to stop a vehicle before it collides with a car or another object. Experts say that making them standard could prevent as much as 20 percent of accidents. [NPR](#)

U.S.: Lamar Alexander takes on mental health 'crisis'

14 March - The top Republican and top Democrat on a key Senate committee have teamed up on a proposal to improve and expand access to mental health services, a bipartisan approach that could become law this year. The proposal would better coordinate the federal bureaucracy for mental health programs, make it easier for states to use federal funds for certain services, and increase treatment options for children, the homeless and people at risk of suicide, according to a 114-page draft released March 7. Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, worked with Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington to build on previous legislative efforts. Their proposal is a broad attempt to address weaknesses in how medical and social service systems handle mental illness and substance abuse. [The Tennessean](#)

U.S.: Michigan reports fatal *Elizabethkingia* case

17 March - Michigan health officials today announced a fatal *Elizabethkingia anopheles* bloodstream infection matching an ongoing outbreak in Wisconsin, according to a statement. The patient was an older adult with underlying health conditions from western Michigan, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) said. ... Wisconsin health officials first announced the outbreak in early March, and so far they have detected 54 cases. Seventeen of the patients died, but it's not clear if the deaths were caused by the bacterial infection. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

U.S.: Utah legislature passes resolution - Pornography is a public health hazard

13 March - The Utah legislature took a bold step late last week by becoming the first in the nation to pass a resolution declaring pornography a public health crisis. The bill, SCR009, sponsored by Sen. Todd Weiler and Rep. Curtis Oda, recognizes pornography is a public

health hazard leading to a broad spectrum of individual and public health impacts and societal harms; and recognizes the need for education, prevention, research, and policy change at the community and societal level in order to address the pornography epidemic that is harming the citizens of Utah and the nation.

[Outbreak News Today](#)

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USPACOM

China: Poorly-managed hypertension rampant in China

16 March - China faces high prevalence and poor management of hypertension, with big public health implications, a cohort study showed. Fully 32.5% of the 500,223 adults ages 35 to 74 from across China who were tested had a systolic blood pressure of at least 140 mm Hg, diastolic of 90 mm Hg, or were on antihypertensive treatment in the prospective, general-population China Kadoorie Biobank study. But the overall control rate was just 4.2%. ... "The levels of diagnosis, treatment, and control were much lower than in Western populations, and were associated with significant excess mortality," the group concluded.

[MedPage Today](#)

Philippines dengue fever cases update and Dengvaxia plan

14 March - The number of dengue fever cases in the Philippines increased by nearly 6000 as the country of some 7000 islands reported 18,790 suspected cases of dengue as of Feb. 20, up from 12,904 suspected cases two weeks prior. In addition, 65 dengue related fatalities have been reported through the first seven weeks of 2016. In December, the Philippines Food and Drug Administration approved Dengvaxia®, a tetravalent dengue vaccine, for the prevention of disease caused by all four dengue types in individuals from 9-45 years of age living in endemic areas, the first country in Asia. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Vietnam: Is Agent Orange still causing birth defects?

16 March - Vietnamese doctors claim that the defoliant Agent Orange, sprayed during the Vietnam War, causes genetic defects in children and grandchildren of people who were exposed. U.S. animal tests show that genetic damage from dioxin in Agent Orange can be passed on to offspring, but species vary widely in how susceptible they are. No human studies exist. American scientists say Vietnamese research linking Agent Orange exposure to birth defects is flawed. Authorities there have not allowed American experts to conduct studies in Vietnam. Without admitting guilt, Congress approved \$21 million to help disabled people in Vietnam, but that country says the aid should be far higher. [Scientific American](#)

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Argentina reports its first local chikungunya cases as outbreak grows

14 March - Argentina has reported its first locally acquired chikungunya cases ever, as the outbreak in the Americas expands by more than 10,000 cases, the World Health Organization (WHO) and its regional office, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) reported. The WHO said today that Argentinian officials on Mar 7 reported 1,281 suspected chikungunya cases in 2015, including 21 that were lab-confirmed and 22 classified as probable, the agency said in a news release today. The country also noted 1,030 suspected cases through February of this year, including 55 lab-confirmed and 4 probable. Of the lab-confirmed cases, 30 were acquired within the country. ... In its weekly update on Mar 11, meanwhile, PAHO reported 9,079 new cases for the year, not including the new WHO-noted infections in Argentina. When Argentina's 2016 cases are added in, the 2016 total rises to 10,109. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

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