

18 September 2015

# Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center



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## NOTICE:

There will be no Army Public Health Weekly Update next week. Publication will resume on 2 October.

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## U.S. Army Injury Surveillance Summary

The U.S. Army Injury Surveillance Summary provides an annual update of injury-related medical encounters for non-deployed U.S. Army Soldiers, including rates over time for Active Duty and trainees, types and causes of hospitalizations and outpatient visits, and frequencies of injuries by body location and diagnosis.



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## **Insect Repellent Poster: We've Got Your Back**

Information on various insect repellents that includes ingredients, uses, NSN as well as application instructions. Available in print or for download from the [APHC Health Information Products eCatalog](#).



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### **U.S. MILITARY**

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## **Morbidity burdens attributable to various illnesses and injuries in deployed (per Theater Medical Data Store [TMDS]) Active and Reserve Component Service Members, U.S. Armed Forces, 2008–2014**

August 2015 - This report estimates illness and injury-related morbidity and the healthcare “burden” for service members during deployments to the CENTCOM and AFRICOM theaters of operation during 2008–2014. During the 7-year surveillance period, a total of 2,863,834 medical encounters occurred among 1,596,935 service members who were deployed. Four burden categories comprised 50% or more of the total healthcare burden among both male and female deployers: injury and poisoning, mental disorders, musculoskeletal diseases, and signs and symptoms. In both genders, injuries and poisonings, and signs and symptoms, were the top two categories that affected the most individuals. Both genders had the same top four hospitalization categories: injuries and poisonings, signs and symptoms, genitourinary diseases, and digestive diseases. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

## **Robotic limbs get a sense of touch**

14 September - ... The U.S. Defense Department’s research division last week [issued] a press release touting a 28-year-old paralyzed person’s ability to “feel” physical sensations through a prosthetic hand. Researchers have directly connected the artificial appendage to his brain, giving him the ability to even identify which mechanical finger is being gently touched, according to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). ... The government isn’t providing much detail at this time about its achievement other than to say that researchers ran wires from arrays connected to the volunteer’s sensory and motor cortices—which identify tactile sensations and control body movements, respectively—to a mechanical hand developed by the Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) at Johns Hopkins University. The APL hand’s torque sensors can convert pressure applied to any of its fingers into electrical signals routed back to the volunteer’s brain. [Scientific American](#)

## The Role of Clinicians in Addressing the Opioid Overdose Epidemic

Date: September 24, 2015

Time: 2:00 - 3:00 pm (ET)

Dial In Number:

888-469-1370

(U.S. Callers);

517-308-9218

(International Callers)

Passcode: 3791890

### Webinar

The nonmedical use of prescription opioids and the use of the illicit opioid heroin cause significant morbidity and mortality in the United States. Recent data indicate these public health problems are intertwined with one another and require a coordinated response between public health, healthcare providers, public safety, and the community. During this COCA Call, participants will learn about the drivers of the increases in opioid-related morbidity and mortality and steps clinicians can take to reverse these concerning trends.

## Sleep issues bedeviling soldiers' health

15 September - ... Surgeon General of the Army Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho [says,] "If you have less than six hours of sleep for six days in a row ... you are cognitively impaired as if you had a .08-percent alcohol level. ... We never will allow a soldier in our formation with a .08-percent alcohol level, but we allow it [sleep deprivation] every day [in soldiers who have] to make those complex decisions." Adding to what Horoho said, [Lt. Col. Kate E.] Van Arman pointed out that after being awake 17 hours, response time has been shown to be the equivalent to a person with a blood alcohol content of .05 percent and 24-hours awake translates to a blood alcohol concentration, or BAC, of .10 percent. ... Overall, one-third of military members sleep less than five hours per night and two-thirds less than six, she said. Deployed soldiers get an astonishing average of just three hours of sleep per night, she said, particularly those serving in the combat arms branches. [Health.mil](#)

## Soldiers in uniform pose for photo to 'normalize breastfeeding'



13 September - ... [There is] a new nursing room in the headquarters of Fort Bliss, the Army post in El Paso, Texas. It has comfortable chairs, a refrigerator for storing milk and a sink -- small things that make a big difference when you need to expel breast milk every few hours. All that was missing was a touch of decor on

the bare walls. To make the room more inviting, Ruby, now an El Paso photographer, offered her services to donate pictures for the room. ... The shoot went off without a hitch, resulting in a photo that's drawing praise for normalizing breastfeeding within the hypermasculine context of the military. ... Through the Fort Bliss support group for mothers (full name, [Pregnancy and Postpartum Physical Training Program](#); P3T for short) Ruby sought active duty soldiers to model in the photos. [CNN](#)

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### GLOBAL

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## Call for mass de-worming exercise

16 September - A large-scale de-worming treatment programme is needed to rid some 1.5 billion people of these harmful and unpleasant parasites, say researchers. The Stanford University team says the World Health Organization needs to step up its response - but the WHO says this could breed drug-resistant infections. Currently, eradication is focused largely on school-aged children living in high-prevalence areas. The Stanford team's research recommends mass treatment of whole communities. [BBC News](#)

## 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.

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## Ebola virus mutations may help it evade drug treatment

11 September - Genetic mutations called "escape variants" in the deadly Ebola virus appear to block the ability of antibody-based treatments to ward off infection, according to a team of U.S. Army scientists and collaborators. Their findings, published online this week in the journal Cell Reports, have implications for the continued development of therapeutics to treat Ebola virus disease, which has claimed the lives of over 11,000 people in West Africa since last year. [Science Daily](#)

## How mutant viral swarms spread disease

14 September - Viruses exist as "mutant clouds" of closely related individuals, an insight that is helping researchers predict where disease is likely to spread. ... The same biological quirks that have contributed to [chikungunya's] success are showing researchers how to fight it—and other viruses like it. Chik is an RNA virus, just like influenza, West Nile virus, hepatitis and Ebola, among others. Unlike DNA viruses, which contain two copies of their genetic information, RNA viruses are single-stranded. When they replicate, any errors in the single strand get passed on. As a result, copying is sloppy, and so each new generation of RNA viruses tends to have lots of errors. In only a few generations, a single virus can become a mutant swarm of closely related viruses. ... [Most] of the mutations in viral clouds create problems for the virus. Researchers assumed that any single mutated version of a healthy virus was likely destined for extinction. But then in 2006, scientists published an account of a thriving dengue virus in Myanmar with what should have been a catastrophic error in the middle of a vital gene. [Scientific American](#)

## Iran nuclear deal will bolster global health

15 September - National security and regional stability have dominated the political debate over the Iran nuclear accord in recent weeks. Less discussed, however, are the far-reaching, positive implications for public health that will come when sanctions are lifted, as the deal calls for, and Iran's medical system can begin to cooperate with the West again. Sanctions for several years have severely restricted access to life-saving medicines for patients in Iran, leading to serious health consequences. ... With the nuclear agreement in place, thousands of Iranians will once again receive treatments for diseases like cancer and hemophilia. ... Since the revolution of 1979, Iran has been at the forefront of advancing primary medical care for rural populations through a system of robust health networks, which comprises more than 17,000 rural health facilities. ... Iran has also launched advanced intervention programs for drug users and is home to two out of three HIV surveillance and treatment knowledge hubs for the Eastern Mediterranean region office of the World Health Organization. [Boston Globe](#)

## Pesticide use at home linked to childhood cancer risk

14 September - Children exposed to insecticides at home may have a slightly increased risk of developing leukemia or lymphoma, a new review finds. The analysis, of 16 studies done since the 1990s, found that children exposed to indoor insecticides had an elevated risk of developing the blood cancers. There was also a weaker link between exposure to weed killers and the risk of leukemia. The findings, reported online Sept. 14 and in the October print issue of *Pediatrics*, do not prove that chemical pesticides directly contribute to the cancers. And if they do, researchers said, several questions remain. "We don't know 'how much' exposure it takes, or if there's a critical window in development," said senior researcher Chensheng (Alex) Lu, an associate professor of environmental exposure biology at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston. [CBS News](#)

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## INFLUENZA

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

For 2014-2015 Influenza Season Week 35 ending September 5, 2015

- Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) Mortality Surveillance: During week 35, 5.0% of all deaths reported through the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System were due to P&I. This percentage was below the epidemic threshold of 5.8% for week 35.
- Outpatient Illness Surveillance: Nationwide during week 35, 0.9% of patient visits reported through the U.S. Outpatient Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) were due to influenza-like illness (ILI). This percentage is below the national baseline of 2.0%. [CDC](#)

### NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 12 September 2015:

- Influenza: No new cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were moderately elevated at MCRD San Diego and substantially elevated at Fort Benning, Fort Leonard Wood, and Lackland Air Force Base (data for Lackland through 18 July). [Naval Health Research Center](#)

## Study finds age, hand hygiene tied to H7N9 death

14 September - A Chinese team has determined that age, hand hygiene practices, and peak C-reactive protein (CRP) levels are independently associated with H7N9 avian flu death, according to a report yesterday in the International Journal of Infectious Diseases. The researchers analyzed data from 85 patients with lab-confirmed H7N9 from Mar 1, 2013, to Jun 30, 2014. Their univariate analysis found the following factors associated with H7N9 death: age 60 or older, low education level, chronic diseases, poor hand hygiene, time from illness onset to the first medical visit and to intensive care, incubation period of 5 days or less, peak CRP 120 mg/L or higher, increased initial neutrophil count, decreased initial lymphocytes count, and both lungs infected initially. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

## U.S.: Influenza vaccination coverage among health care personnel, 2014–15 influenza season

18 September - The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends annual influenza vaccination for all health care personnel (HCP) to reduce influenza-related morbidity and mortality among both HCP and their patients and to decrease absenteeism among HCP (1–5). To estimate influenza vaccination coverage among U.S. HCP for the 2014–15 influenza season, CDC conducted an opt-in Internet panel survey of 1,914 HCP during March 31–April 15, 2015. Overall, 77.3% of HCP survey participants reported receiving an influenza vaccination during the 2014–15 season, similar to the 75.2% coverage among HCP reported for the 2013–14 season (6)...Comprehensive vaccination strategies that include making vaccine available at no cost at the workplace along with active promotion of vaccination might help increase vaccination coverage among HCP and reduce the risk for influenza to HCP and their patients (1,6,7). [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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### **VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY**

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## Deadly Heartland virus is much more common than scientists thought

16 September - It's called the Heartland virus disease. Since it was first detected in 2009, there have been only nine reported cases in the Midwest, including two deaths. So scientists thought the Heartland virus was limited to a small region. That assumption was wrong. A team at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has now found signs that Heartland virus is circulating in deer, raccoons, coyotes and moose in 13 states — from Texas to North Carolina and Florida to Maine. "It was not only in these states, but it was fairly common," says biologist Nick Komar, who led the study. "It's very possible there have been many other cases that have been overlooked." [NPR](#)

## Two dead in cucumber *Salmonella* outbreak

13 September - Two women have died in the multi-state outbreak of *Salmonella Poona* linked to cucumbers grown in Mexico. One was from Texas, the other from California. They were among the 341 people in 30 states who have been sickened by contaminated cucumbers. Both women were in high-risk categories for *Salmonella* infection which includes children, seniors, those with compromised immune systems and those with serious underlying health conditions. One of the women was 99 years old, the other had underlying health conditions, according to health officials. [Food Poisoning Bulletin](#)

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### WELLNESS

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## FDA orders Reynolds to stop sales of four cigarette brands

15 September - Reynolds American Inc can no longer sell Camel Crush bold and three other types of cigarettes in the United States, because the company has not shown they carry no greater health risk than similar products on the market before Feb. 15, 2007, regulators said on Tuesday. The Food and Drug Administration move comes three weeks after the agency told Reynolds and two of its rivals that they could not claim their products are "natural" or "additive-free" without regulatory approval. Reynolds sells Natural American Spirit cigarettes through its subsidiary, Santa Fe Natural Tobacco Co. Two other companies were given similar warnings. [Reuters](#)

## From club to clinic: How MDMA could help some cope with trauma

13 September - MDMA, often known as Ecstasy or Molly, has for decades been used as a party drug — consumed in clubs, fuel for all-night raves. But lately, the substance is also being used in very different settings, for a very different purpose: to treat post-traumatic stress disorder. The Food and Drug Administration has approved phase two clinical studies of the treatment, and they're now underway in four locations. Results so far have been promising, according to reporter Kelley McMillan, who has been investigating this new use of MDMA and has written about it in the current issue of [Marie Claire](#). "The findings from these most recent studies are supporting the earlier phase two findings, which found that 83 percent of participants were cured of their PTSD — compared to 25 percent who were cured from talk therapy alone," she tells NPR's Rachel Martin. These conclusions remain preliminary, however, and phase two trials often fail by the time they reach phase three.

[NPR](#)

## Landmark NIH study shows intensive blood pressure management may save lives

11 September - More intensive management of high blood pressure, below a commonly recommended blood pressure target, significantly reduces rates of cardiovascular disease, and lowers risk of death in a group of adults 50 years and older with high blood pressure. This is according to the initial results of a landmark clinical trial sponsored by the National Institutes of Health called the Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT). The intervention in this trial, which carefully adjusts the amount or type of blood pressure medication to achieve a target systolic pressure of 120 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg), reduced rates of cardiovascular events, such as heart attack and heart failure, as well as stroke, by almost a third and the risk of death by almost a quarter, as compared to the target systolic pressure of 140 mm Hg. [NIH](#)

## Little kids getting drunk on yummy hand sanitizers

15 September - ... The number of cases of kids younger than 12 reported to poison control centers for ingesting hand sanitizer, which now comes in "fun" flavors such as grape and strawberry, nearly quadrupled across the US in just a few years, according to an analysis by the Georgia Poison Center, jumping from 3,266 cases in 2010 to 16,117 in 2014, reports [CNN](#). While beer and wine tend to contain about 5% and 12% alcohol respectively, hand sanitizer can range from 45% to 95%, a concentration so high that just a few squirts can actually cause alcohol poisoning. [USA Today](#)

## Mediterranean diet with extra olive oil may lower breast cancer risk

14 September - ... [Researchers] say that eating a Mediterranean diet supplemented with four tablespoons per day of extra-virgin olive oil reduces the risk of breast cancer. "We found a strong reduction in the risk of breast cancer," says Miguel Martinez Gonzalez, an author of the study and a leading researcher on the preventive health effects of the Mediterranean diet at the University of Navarra in Spain. For his latest study, which appears Monday in *JAMA: Internal Medicine*, Martinez Gonzales assigned about 4,000 women between the ages of 60 and 80 to follow either the Mediterranean-plus-olive-oil diet or a low-fat diet. He found that the women following the Mediterranean diet had a 68 percent lower relative risk of developing breast cancer during a five-year follow-up period compared with women on the low-fat diet. [NPR](#)

## Outdoor play 'good for the eyes'

15 September - Getting children to play outside for 40 minutes a day could be a way to curb growing rates of short-sightedness, according to Chinese researchers. They asked six schools to test the strategy over three years and it appeared to be beneficial. The findings in *Jama* support the theory that children need to balance "close up" work, like reading, with activities that use distance vision. Experts say although myopia is now very common, the

cause remains unknown. ... Over the course of the study, 259 children out of 853 (30%) in the intervention group and 287 out of 726 (40%) in the control group were judged to have myopia - a refractive error of at least minus 0.5 Diopter on an eye exam. [BBC News](#)

## Portion size key in tackling obesity, says study

15 September - Reducing the portion sizes offered in supermarkets, restaurants and at home would help reverse the obesity epidemic, say researchers. They say their review of 61 studies provides the "most conclusive evidence to date" that portion size affects how much we unwittingly eat. The team at the University of Cambridge also said smaller plates, glasses and cutlery helped people eat less. Experts said people were "reluctant" to leave a plate with food on it. Their data, published in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, shows that when people are offered more food they will eat it. [BBC News](#)

## To deter poisoning of children, safety measures for packaging of laundry pods are approved

15 September - Every year, increasing numbers of children eat or inhale the contents of brightly colored packets of laundry detergent that they mistake for candy or teething toys. On Tuesday, the first safety standard for packaging and labeling so-called laundry pods was approved by ASTM International, an organization that helps establish product standards. The recommendations were negotiated over the past year by a group of industry representatives, consumer and medical groups, and officials from the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission. [Reuters](#)

## USPSTF recommends low-dose aspirin to prevent CVD, colorectal cancer in some patient groups

15 September - The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, in a draft statement, is recommending low-dose aspirin to prevent both cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer in adults aged 50 to 59 years who have a 10-year CVD risk of 10% or greater (grade B recommendation). Patients aged 60 to 69 should talk to their clinicians about whether the benefits of daily aspirin outweigh the risks (grade C). [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

## Virtual Hope Box puts suicide prevention tools at users' fingertips



11 September - One of the tools used in suicide prevention is a hope box—a container with user-selected items that help those who are stressed to cope with tough times. A hope box might contain a letter or email, a photo of special times and loved ones, or inspirational quotes; anything that can lift spirits. But carrying around a shoebox can be impractical, which is why a smartphone app has been developed that

keeps those same resources close at hand for those in need. "We've designed the Virtual Hope Box (VHB) to be a smartphone tool for moments of crisis and sudden need," said Nigel Bush, a research psychologist for the Defense Department's National Center for Telehealth & Technology (T2), a component center of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury. "It supplements treatments already happening." [Health.mil](#)

## Virus in cattle linked to breast cancer in women

16 September - Researchers have established for the first time a link between the bovine leukemia virus (BLV) and human breast cancer. Bovine leukemia virus infects blood cells and mammary tissue of dairy and beef cattle. The retrovirus is easily transmitted among cattle primarily through infected blood and milk, but it only causes disease in fewer than five percent of infected animals. The analysis of breast tissue from 239 women showed a higher likelihood of the presence of BLV in breast cancer tissue. When the data was analysed statistically, the odds of having breast cancer if BLV were present was 3.1 times greater than if BLV was absent. [Times of India](#)

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### USAFRICOM

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## Africa: Malaria - '700 million cases' stopped in Africa

16 September - Nearly 700 million cases of malaria have been prevented in Africa as a result of concerted efforts to tackle the disease since 2000, a study shows. The report published in the journal Nature showed that overall the number of infections fell by 50% across the continent. Bed nets were responsible for the vast majority of the decrease. ... The researchers from the University of Oxford analysed data from 30,000 sites in sub-Saharan Africa to estimate that 663 million cases were prevented over the past 15 years.

- 68% of the reduction was down to the distribution of a billion insecticide-treated bed nets
- 22% was attributed to the treatment artemisinin
- 10% to spraying homes with insecticide. [BBC News](#)

## Democratic Republic of Congo: Measles outbreak kills 400

14 September - More than 23,000 people, mostly children, have been infected with measles in the Katanga region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. More than 400 have died, according to United Nations agencies and Doctors Without Borders. ... The epidemic started in February, but as of early this month, the central government in Kinshasa had not

acknowledged that it was underway and deaths were not being officially counted, he said. ... Many children in the region already have been weakened by malaria and malnutrition. [New York Times](#)

## Nigeria: Sixty percent of Nigeria's children experience violence

16 September - Six out of 10 Nigerian children experience some form of violence and a quarter of girls suffer sexual violence, according to a survey conducted by Nigeria's population commission. ... It found that a parent or adult relative was the most common perpetrator of physical violence such as punching, kicking, intentional burning, choking or intention to drown. Girls usually experienced their first form of sexual violence in their early teens, often with their first romantic partner. One in 10 boys also suffered sexual violence, mostly perpetrated by classmates or neighbors. Over 70 percent of sexual violence victims reported more than one incident. [Reuters](#)

## Senegal: Chikungunya

14 September - On 9 September 2015, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (MOHSA) of Senegal notified WHO of active circulation of chikungunya virus in the region of Kédougou. The circulation began on 27 August 2015. Samples were collected from 14 suspected cases for laboratory-confirmation at the Institut Pasteur of Dakar. Ten (10) samples tested positive for chikungunya virus. As of 8 September 2015, ten (10) chikungunya confirmed cases were reported. The latest active circulation in the affected area was reported between 2009 and 2010. [WHO](#)

## Sierra Leone reports 2 more Ebola cases, 1 fatal

14 September - Sierra Leone has reported two more Ebola cases, including a fatal one that is not part of a recent cluster in the northwestern Kambia district. The country's National Ebola Response Center (NERC) reported another infection in a contact of a 67-year-old woman who died in late August in Sella Kafta, a village of almost 1,000 people in Kambia, Xinhua, China's state news agency, reported late last week. The cluster has now risen to six cases, including the index one. The new case involves a relative of the older woman who took part in washing and burying her body, a NERC spokesman said. ... The other new case involves a 16-year-old girl who might have had sexual contact with an Ebola survivor, Reuters reported today. She lived in Bombali district, which had not had an Ebola case in nearly 6 months. The district lies to the east of Kambia. ... Sexual transmission is suspected because the girl had not traveled outside the village in year. But Conteh said, "We are baffled by that possibility because the survivor in question was discharged in March, way beyond the 90-day period within which sexual transmission is said to be possible." [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

## United Republic of Tanzania: Cholera

11 September - The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) of Tanzania has notified WHO of foci of cholera outbreaks in the country. Rorya district in the Mara region of Tanzania was the first area to report a cholera outbreak. By late July 2015, the Kigoma region also became affected – although no new case has been recorded in this area in more than three weeks. On 25 August, new foci of cholera were identified in Dar es Salaam, Pwani (Coast), Iringa and Morogoro. The cholera outbreak in the Dar es Salaam region began on 15 August, whilst the outbreak in the Morogoro region started on 18 August. As of 6 September, the cumulative number of cholera cases (both suspected and confirmed) is 971 cases, including 13 deaths. Laboratory tests confirmed the presence of *Vibrio cholerae* O1 Ogawa in the affected areas. [WHO](#)

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### USCENTCOM

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## Lebanon: Doctors warn of spread of cholera in refugee camps as rubbish crisis intensifies

15 September - Syrians and Palestinians refugees living in insanitary conditions in Lebanon's camps are at risk from cholera and typhoid epidemics as the country struggles with an ongoing rubbish crisis, health organisations have warned. ... Doctors working in the refugee camps have also raised the alarm after the Environment Ministry closed the controversial Naameh landfill, the major dumpsite for Beirut and Mount Lebanon, on 17 July, leading to the accumulation of piles of rubbish in the streets. To get rid of it, people started "backyard burning" (burning rubbish in the open) in crowded residential areas and garbage trucks illegally dumped the collected wastes in rivers. [International Business News](#)

## Saudi Arabia bans hajj camel slaughter

11 September - Saudi Arabia on Friday banned the slaughter of camels during this year's hajj pilgrimage, after a surge in deaths from the MERS virus linked to the animals. Camels will not be allowed to enter the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, the Permanent Committee for Fatwa said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency. Hundreds of thousands of faithful from around the world have begun to gather for the annual hajj, which is expected to begin on September 21. ... As part of the hajj rituals, pilgrims traditionally slaughter animals and give the meat to the needy. The World Health Organization has cited the preliminary results of studies indicating that people working with camels are at increased risk of infection from the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV). [Yahoo! News](#)

## Saudi Arabia: Health workers among 3 new Saudi MERS patients

15 September - ... Saudi Arabia reported three more illnesses today, two of them in foreign healthcare workers in Riyadh. The new MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) infections come against the backdrop of an ongoing large hospital outbreak in the Saudi capital, as well as continued transmission in a handful of other cities, including Medina, one the country's holy cities set to host large crowds for the Hajj pilgrimage, which starts on Sep 20. ... Today's newly announced cases lift Saudi Arabia's total from the disease since it was first detected in humans in 2012 to 1,238, which includes 523 deaths. [CIDRAP](#)

## Syria: UNICEF - Syrian refugee children risk abuse, exploitation

11 September - The United Nations Children's Fund is calling for urgent action by the European Union to fully protect children fleeing conflict in Syria. ... The U.N. Children's Fund found that children made up one-quarter of all asylum seekers in Europe so far this year. ... Peter Salama, UNICEF's regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said ... it is important to remember why Syrians are fleeing their homeland. "Especially for the children, it is becoming a living hell," he said. "We know that millions of people are now living under siege. Water is being deliberately cut off to population centers, education and health facilities and their personnel are regularly being targeted." Salama said children are being killed and maimed by aerial bombardment. He said boys as young as eight are being forcibly recruited as combat soldiers. Girls are being used as sexual slaves or forced into early marriages. [VOA](#)

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### USEUCOM

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## United Kingdom: Assisted Dying Bill - MPs reject 'right to die' law

11 September - MPs have rejected plans for a right to die in England and Wales in their first vote on the issue in almost 20 years. In a free vote in the Commons, 118 MPs were in favour and 330 against plans to allow some terminally ill adults to end their lives with medical supervision. In a passionate debate, some argued the plans allowed a "dignified and peaceful death" while others said they were "totally unacceptable". ... Under the proposals, people with fewer than six months to live could have been prescribed a lethal dose of drugs, which they had to be able to take themselves. Two doctors and a High Court judge would have needed to approve each case. [BBC News](#)

## United Kingdom: Experts criticise 'flimsy' Public Health England e-cigarettes research

16 September - Claims in a report from a government-backed agency saying that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than smoking are based on a "flimsy foundation" and some people involved have links to the tobacco industry, experts have said. Scientists writing in the British Medical Journal joined The Lancet in critiquing the evidence used by Public Health England in its report on e-cigs. PHE released the "landmark" report last month, describing it as a "comprehensive review of the evidence". Yet several leading researchers have questioned if the data behind the report is robust enough and have pointed out links between some PHE experts, the tobacco industry and companies that make e-cigs. An editorial in The Lancet medical journal attacked the "extraordinarily flimsy foundation" on which PHE based its major conclusion. [ITV News](#)

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### USNORTHCOM

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## U.S.: Blacks fare worse than whites after heart attacks

14 September - After a heart attack, black patients typically don't live as long as whites – a racial difference that is starkest among the affluent – according to a new U.S. study. Researchers evaluated data on more than 132,000 white heart attack patients and almost 9,000 black patients covered by Medicare. ... They used postal codes to assess income levels in patients' communities. After 17 years of follow-up, the overall survival rate was 7.4 percent for white patients and 5.7 percent for black patients. ... On average, across all ages, white patients in low-income areas lived longer after a heart attack – about 5.6 years compared with 5.4 years for black patients. But in high-income communities, the gap widened to a life expectancy of seven years for white people and 6.3 years for black individuals. "We found that socioeconomic status did not explain the racial disparities in life expectancy after a heart attack." [Reuters](#)

## U.S.: Cancer remains leading cause of death among Hispanics

16 September - Cancer remains the leading cause of death among Hispanics in the U.S., driven in large part by lung malignancies in men and breast tumors in women, a new report finds. This year, Hispanics in the U.S. will experience 125,900 new cases of cancer and 37,800 deaths from cancer, the report predicts. Among men, lung tumors will account for one in six cancer deaths, while breast malignancies will account 16 percent of cancer fatalities among Hispanic women, the researchers estimate. [Reuters](#)

## U.S.: CDC appoints new safety czar to improve handling of dangerous pathogens

15 September - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Tuesday tapped Dr. Stephen Monroe, a longtime lab scientist and agency insider, to oversee the safe handling of dangerous pathogens by more than 2,000 scientists in the agency's more than 150 labs. ... Creating a new high-level safety position was a key recommendation of a months-long internal investigation into the mishandling of anthrax, bird flu and Ebola in CDC labs in 2014, according to an internal CDC memo obtained by Reuters in December. [Reuters](#)

## U.S.: Floods in Utah kill 16, leave four missing

16 September - Two vehicles carrying women and children from a park were washed away by a flash flood barreling down a canyon near the Utah-Arizona border, leaving 12 people dead and one person missing, officials said Tuesday. It was not the only deadly incident attributable to the fast-moving water. In Zion National Park's Keyhole Canyon, four people who were canyoneering were killed and three are missing, National Park Service officials said. At least six children and three women died in the vehicles that were swept away in the border area, according to Utah officials in the city of Hildale and with Washington County Emergency Services. Three people survived Monday's flood, including a boy who was found walking around a creek, said Hildale Mayor Philip Barlow. [CNN](#)

## U.S.: Immediate need for healthcare facilities to review procedures for cleaning, disinfecting, and sterilizing reusable medical devices

11 September - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are alerting healthcare providers and facilities about the public health need to properly maintain, clean, and disinfect or sterilize reusable medical devices. Recent infection control lapses due to non-compliance with recommended reprocessing procedures highlight a critical gap in patient safety. Healthcare facilities (e.g., hospitals, ambulatory surgical centers, clinics, and doctors' offices) that utilize reusable medical devices are urged to immediately review current reprocessing practices at their facility to ensure they (1) are complying with all steps as directed by the device manufacturers, and (2) have in place appropriate policies and procedures that are consistent with current standards and guidelines. [CDC Health Alert Network](#)

## U.S.: Michigan resident tests positive for plague

14 September - A Michigan resident is recovering from the state's first ever confirmed case of bubonic plague, state health officials said on Monday. The adult resident of Marquette County in the state's Upper Peninsula recently returned from a Colorado area with reported plague activity and there is no cause for concern about human-to-human contact, the state health department said. It was the 14th human plague case reported nationally in 2015,

more than four times the average of three cases annually of the rare and potentially life-threatening flea-borne illness, state health officials said. [Reuters](#)

## U.S.: One dead, hundreds of Northern California homes burn in wildfires



14 September - Ross Hardester says official information on the wildfire raging around the town of Middletown, Calif., is hard to get, but he is learning plenty from the faces of the people who come into his store. The Valley Fire, one of more than a dozen wildfires roaring across parched California, has left one person dead, destroyed hundreds of homes and sent thousands of residents scrambling to safety. Many of the lost homes are in the Middletown area. ... The Valley Fire, which forced California Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a state of emergency in Lake and Napa counties, had grown to more than 60,000 acres and was only 5% contained early Monday, state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Daniel Berlant said. The fire started Saturday afternoon northwest of Sacramento. Four firefighters have been injured. ... More than 17,000 people as of Sunday afternoon had been forced from their homes. ... The cause of the Valley Fire, which started near the community of Cobb, is under investigation. [USA Today](#)

## U.S.: Psychiatrist shortage worsens amid 'mental health crisis'

15 September - The demand for psychiatrists is becoming a more pressing issue for state and federal lawmakers and has contributed to an expansion of insurance coverage of telehealth to increase access to mental health services in shortage areas. Companies who recruit doctors for health facilities say psychiatrists are almost as desired as primary care doctors, which have for years been the most in-demand physicians in the healthcare labor market. ... Without a large number of mental health providers, employers and commercial insurers are expanding remote digital access to psychiatrists and other behavioral health professionals. Health insurers ... are increasing access to behavioral providers like MDLive, Teladoc and others that provide remote digital access to a variety of health services. [Forbes](#)

## U.S.: Teen marijuana use down despite greater availability

15 September - Marijuana use among American high school students is significantly lower today than it was 15 years ago, despite the legalization in many states of marijuana for medical purposes, a move toward decriminalization of the drug and the approval of recreational use in a handful of places, new research suggests. [Researchers] say, however, that marijuana use is significantly greater than the use of other illegal drugs, with 40 percent of teens in 2013 saying they had ever smoked marijuana. That number was down from 47 percent in 1999 but up from 37 percent in 2009. By contrast, just 3 percent had ever tried

methamphetamines in 2013 as compared to 9 percent in 1999. The findings ... also suggest that a gender gap in marijuana use — where boys outnumbered girls as users of the drug — is shrinking, with males and females now using marijuana at similar rates. And while white and black teens once used marijuana at similar rates, now blacks report using the drug more often. [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News](#)

## U.S.: Two more die from Legionnaire's at Quincy vets home

14 September - The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs says that two more veterans' home residents have died from Legionnaires' disease. That increases the number of recent deaths from the water-borne illness in Quincy to 12. Eleven of those who have died from Legionnaires since August in the Mississippi River city lived at the Illinois Veterans' Home. The bacteria have sickened another 45 people there, including five workers, in addition to the eleven who died at the home. ... All of the elderly residents who died had underlying health conditions that made them more susceptible to the severe form of pneumonia. The source of the outbreak remains unknown as environmental tests continue. [Chicago Sun-Times](#)

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### USPACOM

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## India: Dengue cases in India at 5-year high

13 September - Combatting the rise in dengue fever cases is proving to be a particularly difficult challenge for quite a few Asian countries including India. The number of dengue cases in India has hit a five-year high of nearly 20,000 and is expected to rise further. The subcontinent's annual monsoon season increases both the number of cases and a sense of urgency in tackling the problem. Dr KK Aggarwal, vice president of the Indian Medical Association, said: "There is more awareness, and more cases are getting reported. And this number is only a tip of the iceberg - the number may be more than 10 or 15 times more." [Channel News Asia](#)

## India: Thousands in India die at home from abdominal conditions

11 September - Tens of thousands of people in [India](#) die at home each year of conditions such as peptic ulcer disease, appendicitis and hernias they might have survived with timely surgery, a study suggests. Based on a survey of 1.1 million households in India, researchers estimated that 72,000 people died from acute abdominal conditions in 2010. Most of them died at home and in rural areas, the study found. Because these conditions must be treated quickly, access to round-the-clock emergency surgical facilities is critical to reduce delays in

care and deaths, the researchers note in *The Lancet Global Health*. But in 2010, just 43 percent of the Indian population lived within 50 kilometers (31 miles) of a well-resourced district hospital. [Reuters](#)

## Myanmar: Smartphones bring happiness and headaches to Myanmar



14 September - ... The expanding network of cellphones has enhanced more than just personal lives: it's benefiting agriculture, health care and disaster relief in a place that has had more than its share of tragedy. In August, severe flooding in Myanmar has killed at least 100 people and affected more than 1.3 million others. With greater access to mobile phones, aid workers have been able to more easily locate flood victims than in the past — for example, in 2008 when floods from Cyclone Nargis killed more than 130,000. ... Meanwhile, the growth in smartphone use by farmers is helping move Myanmar's agriculture sector forward. Jim Taylor, co-founder of Proximity Designs, says his group is piloting an app that will allow small-plot farmers to have access to agronomists and reference guides on demand. The company also is developing sensing apps that would measure soil moisture and show farmers the exact dimensions of their plot. [NPR](#)

## Nepal: Earthquakes compound Nepal's water worries

16 September – ... [Nepal] is one of the world's poorest countries, and two-thirds of the population lives without toilets. Water pipes in major cities are old and crumbling — a situation made worse by the earthquake that devastated Kathmandu in April. Diarrhea remains a major killer of Nepalese children, although the death rate was cut in half between 2000 and 2010. Much of the credit goes to a newly recruited corps of "lady health workers" who taught basic hygiene, such as the need to use latrines and wash hands afterward. Local clinics also began stocking packets of oral rehydration solution. ... The Kathmandu earthquake was followed by dire predictions that a cholera epidemic would break out as soon as summer monsoons flooded crowded tent camps. Those fears stemmed from events in Haiti, where a huge earthquake in early 2010 was followed 10 months later by a cholera epidemic. ... But those predictions failed to take into account crucial differences between the countries. In 2010, Haiti had not had a case of cholera in decades, so no one in the population was immune. Cholera is endemic in Nepal, so many adults have survived mild cases in childhood and have immunity. [New York Times](#)

## Singapore: Fires diminish air quality

14 September - Billowing smoke from Indonesian forest fires has engulfed Singapore and much of Malaysia, reducing air quality to unhealthy levels. The Pollutant Standards Index, Singapore's main measure of air pollution, rose to 222 early Monday, the highest level in a year and above the official "very unhealthy" mark set at 200, according to the National

Environment Agency. In neighboring Malaysia the pollution index indicated unhealthy levels early Tuesday through broad swaths of the country. ... The haze affects the region every year and is caused largely by slashing and burning Indonesian forests to clear the land for agriculture. Indonesia's government has sent planes and helicopters to try to extinguish the fires by dropping water and seeding clouds with chemicals, and more than 1,000 soldiers have been sent to Sumatra to help fight the blazes. [New York Times](#)

## Taiwan: Cases of dengue fever multiply in South

15 September - The incidence of dengue fever in Taiwan has risen sharply in recent days, pushing the number of cases since May close to 10,000, the country's Centers for Disease Control reported on Tuesday. The government announced on Monday that it was creating a central command office to combat the rapid increase in the disease, which has been concentrated in the southern cities of Tainan and Kaohsiung. The recent increase follows the worst summer for dengue fever in more than a decade on the island. Taiwan had more than 4,000 dengue cases from May 1 through August, the highest number for the period since systematic record keeping began in 2003. [New York Times](#)

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### USSOUTHCOM

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## Brazil: Yellow fever

16 September - Of the 4 monkeys found dead in the Ceilandia Rural Nucleus last week [beginning 7 Sep 2015], 3 were diagnosed with yellow fever [virus infections]. This information is from the Secretariat of Health of the Federal District (SES-DF). The confirmation came after the collection and testing of samples from the carcasses of the animals. This past Thursday (10 [Sep 2015]), a report was forwarded for [results of testing of] a sample from a 5th dead monkey [when? confirmed or diagnosed as YF? - Mod.RNA]. The animal had been found in the Zoo of the DF [Federal District], and was also diagnosed with the disease. According to the SES-DF, the Directorate of Environmental Surveillance (DIVAL) and the Brasilia Zoo are taking steps to prevent the disease. [ProMED-mail](#)

## Costa Rica: Snake bites peak with El Niño cycling

11 September - Parts of the planet warm and cool during El Niño and La Niña. And infectious diseases also wax and wane in step with the climate cycle. Take malaria—shown to spike in northern Venezuela during cool, La Niña conditions. Or flu pandemics, which often follow months after La Niña sets in. Now researchers have linked another public health risk to El Niño climate cycling: poisonous viper bites. Their study area was Costa Rica—where health centers keep rigorous records on snakebites. They compared nine years of those snakebite records—including some 6,500 bites—to climate data over the same

period. And they found that snakebites were two to three times as prevalent in the hottest and coldest years of the El Niño climate cycle. ... [Researchers] say in hot, dry years, plant productivity peaks, driving an increase in the number of rodents—aka snake food, potentially increasing the number of snakes. And snakes tend to move around more in hot, dry weather—increasing chances they'll encounter—and attack—an unlucky farmer. In cold, wet years, on the other hand, prey numbers plummet—forcing snakes to travel beyond their usual slithering grounds to eat—again increasing chances of an unlucky meeting. [Scientific American](#)

## PAHO chikungunya decline holds

14 September - The Pan American Health Organization for the second week in a row reported low chikungunya outbreak numbers, with only 7,156 new chikungunya cases in the Caribbean and the Americas, as Senegal reported a return of the virus. Last week's PAHO update included only 4,857 new cases. The previous two weekly updates reported 34,866 and 27,867 new cases, respectively. The outbreak total now stands at 1,719,103, cases, PAHO said in a Sep 11 update. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

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The *Army Public Health Weekly Update* is published by the Public Health Information Directorate, Army Public Health Center.

