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- USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program
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- Yemen: Why a man is on an IV in his car outside a hospital in Yemen

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- Spain: Spain’s smoking ban tied to drop in preterm and underweight babies
- United Kingdom: Why ‘WannaCry’ malware caused chaos for National Health Service in U.K.

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- U.S.: Assessing the status of personal protective equipment
- U.S.: CDC Health Alert Network (HAN) Health Advisory about potential for falsely low blood lead test results from LeadCare® analyzers
- U.S.: EPA nixed ban on pesticide linked to sickened farm workers
- U.S.: Measles outbreak total hits 60
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- U.S.: Racial and ethnic disparities persist in sudden infant deaths
- U.S.: Study identifies rare superbug strain in Houston
- U.S.: The Secretary’s Ventures Fund announces 2017 projects
- U.S.: U.S. heart disease deaths drop but wide variation by county remains

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- Cambodia/Japan: How a tsunami in Japan endangered children in Cambodia
- China: Lack of dust makes China’s air pollution much worse
This year's publication reports installation-level population health metrics for Active Component Soldiers based on national leading health indicators and military-relevant measures of health readiness. Health of the Force highlights programs and initiatives with vignette and spotlight sections to provide context for the current surveillance data and showcase the diverse ways in which the Army is enhancing its health readiness.

**U.S. MILITARY**

**Army backs feasibility study for Teleflex’s RePlas freeze-dried plasma**

15 May - Teleflex said today that it launched the Phase I trial of its RePlas lyophilized fresh frozen plasma product being developed with the U.S. Army Medical Material Development Activity. ... The 24-patient study is designed to assess safety and tolerability of RePlas freeze-dried plasma. Healthy volunteers will receive increased doses of their own blood plasma that has been processed using the company’s proprietary lyophilization (freeze drying) and packaging techniques. ... The USAMMDA said that developing a commercially available source of freeze-dried plasma is a top priority, since early administration of plasma is an important step to limiting trauma mortality from uncontrolled bleeding. MassDevice

**GAO: Thousands discharged for military misconduct had mental health diagnosis**

16 May - The top government watchdog said Tuesday that nearly a quarter of U.S. troops discharged for misconduct were given other-than-honorable discharges despite previously being diagnosed with a mental health condition. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) in its report faulted branches of the Department of Defense (DOD) for having policies inconsistent with — or poor enforcement of — official Pentagon rules for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) or sexual trauma. ... According to the GAO, 57,141 of the 91,764 troops separated for misconduct from 2011 through 2015 had been diagnosed with PTSD, TBI or another condition at least two years before their discharge. Of those with a diagnosis, 13,283, or about 23 percent, received other-than-honorable discharges. The Hill

**Hospitalizations, Active Component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2016**

April 2017 - This report documents the frequencies, rates, trends, and distributions of hospitalizations of active component members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps during calendar year 2016. ... In 2016, there were 68,189 records of hospitalizations of active component members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and
Marine Corps; 31% of the hospitalizations were in non-military facilities. The annual hospitalization rate (all causes) for 2016 was 52.9 per 1,000 service member person-years (p-yrs) and was the lowest rate reported within the last 10 years covered in this report.

Hospitalizations, by illness and injury categories. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

Insomnia and sleep apnea rates are high and rising in the U.S. military

15 May - Insomnia cases have quadrupled, and sleep apnea cases have increased five-fold in the U.S. military over a decade, according to a recent study. Rates of these two sleep disorders among service members are now about double those seen in the general U.S. population, the study team writes in the Journal of Sleep Research. ... The rising rates of military service members experiencing insomnia and sleep apnea over the past decade could affect operational readiness, wellbeing and healthcare costs, Lieberman’s team writes. ... They found that medical visits for sleep apnea increased from 44 per 1,000 people per year in 2005 to 273 per 1,000 per year in 2014. Visits for insomnia increased from 16 per 1,000 per year in 2005 to 75 per 1,000 per year in 2014. ... In general, insomnia rates were higher among women, African Americans, people over age 40, enlisted personnel and in the Army, compared to other military branches. Obstructive sleep apnea rates were highest among men, African Americans, senior officers, Army personnel and those over age 40.

Reuters

Jim Mattis faces a difficult decision on the military's transgender policy

17 May - The Pentagon is prepared to implement a new policy clearing the way for transgender men and women to join the armed forces, Military Times has learned, but final approval rests with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who could endorse, revise, delay or even abandon it. Mattis faces a July 1 deadline, according to the parameters defined by his predecessor as defense secretary, Ash Carter. But the sensitive matter has become much more urgent for two transgender students now within days of graduating from the Army and Air Force military academies. As USA Today first reported May 10, the unidentified cadets were recently informed that, absent a policy formalizing new accession standards, they won’t be commissioned as military officers with the rest of their graduating class. Those proposed guidelines were sent to the defense secretary’s office but Mattis has yet to act on them. Military Times

Lockheed exoskeleton gives troops a leg up, literally

17 May - ... For a soldier humping his weapons, ammo and body armor up a mountain in Afghanistan or a high-rise building in a future urban battle, a device to take the load off would be welcome. ... The Lockheed exoskeleton’s full and unwieldy designation is FORTIS Knee-Stress Relief Device (K-SRD). ... [It's a sophisticated synthesis of multiple technologies:]

- a rigid load-bearing framework to transfer weight off the wearer to the ground;
- compact actuators at the knee to increase strength (future models may add
Community Readiness and Resiliency Integrators

(CR2Is) are Army Civilian employees who integrate and synchronize health and wellness initiatives to support senior commander priorities on Army installations. These initiatives include fitness centers, chapels and financial readiness.

The 2016 Health of the Force report highlights the physical and psychological struggles that many active duty Soldiers face in achieving mission-ready status.

The CR2I’s initiatives will assist these Soldiers and their commanders in mitigating these health concerns so that the Army can continue to achieve mission readiness, increase performance, and improve retention in a complex and dynamic environment.

New study offers hope in targeting focusing, emotional control problems in vets with PTSD

11 May - A new study has identified what happens in the brains of veterans with post-traumatic stress as they have trouble refocusing their attention and regulating their emotions -- and offers hope for some effective treatments, according to one of study’s lead authors. ... In the study, veterans diagnosed with PTSD had more difficulty focusing their attention away from cues related to threats, and controlling their emotions, when compared to veterans without PTSD, researchers found. ... Two areas of the brain showed difference when observed in those with and without the diagnosis, Khanna said in an interview: The prefrontal cortex that controls attention, and the medial temporal area, which is often activated by emotional thoughts. ... Khanna said the study results don’t mean that those with PTSD have fewer attention resources in their brains, or that that they have developed attention deficit disorder. “It’s more that they have difficulty directing their attention to things that are not related to threat if there’s something threatening around them, or that they’re exposed to,” she said. Military Times

Portable battlefield brain scanner can detect bleeding in the skull

15 May - Marine Corps Systems Command is bringing a portable scanner to front line Marines, one that can quickly catch brain bleeding and potentially save lives, said the U.S. Marine Corps. The Infrascanner can detect intracranial hematomas early on, meaning it can tell if there is bleeding in the skull. And it can even be used on the battlefield. Current remote facilities do not have the capability for such immediate diagnosis. Marine Corps Times

Study looks at ongoing Army, Marine efforts to lighten body armor, troop load

14 May - The Army and Marine Corps continue to work together to try and reduce the weight of troops’ body armor, according to a recent government study. The study by the Government Accountability Office noted joint efforts to reduce the weight of body armor and listed multiple options in the works to further decrease the load. ... On average, body armor weighs about 27 pounds, according to the study. ... That makes up a good chunk of the average total load of 117 pounds being carried by Marines and 119 pounds being carried by soldiers, according to the report. ... Both branches have made updates and
Fact Sheets on Stored Product Pests:

**Carpet Beetles**
The black carpet beetle (*Attagenus unicolor*) and the variegated carpet beetle (*Anthrenus verbasci*) cause major damage to fabrics, carpets, furs, and stored foods inside your home. In an industrial setting, they can be found in and around warehouses and are found in grain-based anticoagulant baits commonly used for rodent control in food warehouses. Carpet beetles also feed on dead animals and preserved animal specimens, including insect collections.

**Booklice (Psocids)**
Booklice (Psocids) are small, soft-bodied insects. Despite their name, booklice, also called psocids, are not true lice and do not transmit disease. They prefer to feed on mold, fungi, grains, insect fragments, and other starchy material. Dry food products commonly infested include cereals, pasta, flour, powdered milk, chocolate, and yeast. Infestation of packaged food products is uncommon, but booklice can be annoying when present in large numbers. Reducing humidity below 50% will eliminate most booklouse infestations.

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**GLOBAL**

Closing in on a breakthrough

17 May - Researchers at Boston Children's Hospital have, for the first time, generated blood-forming stem cells in the lab using pluripotent stem cells, which can make virtually every cell type in the body. The advance, published today in the journal Nature, opens new avenues for research into the root causes of blood diseases and ways to create immune-matched blood cells, derived from patients' own cells, for treatment purposes. ... Although the cells made from the pluripotent stem cells are a mix of true blood stem cells and other cells known as blood progenitor cells, they are capable of generating multiple types of human blood cells when put into mice. "This step opens up an opportunity to take cells from patients with genetic blood disorders, use gene editing to correct their genetic defect, and make functional blood cells," said Ryohichi Sugimura, the study's first author and a postdoctoral fellow in the Daley Lab. "This also gives us the potential to have a limitless supply of blood stem cells and blood by taking cells from universal donors. Harvard Gazette

G20 health ministers seek to avert return to "pre-penicillin era"

18 May - The world risks a return to the pre-penicillin era if leading nations do not cooperate to combat the threat from antibiotic-resistant bugs and means are not found to finance research into new, more effective medicine, Germany's health minister said. Speaking ahead of Friday's first meeting of health ministers from the Group of 20 leading developed and developing economies, Hermann Groehe said more collaboration was needed to minimize the risk posed by possible pandemics. "There must be no return to the pre-penicillin era," he told Reuters in an interview authorized for publication on Thursday. "It would be a dramatic development if such an important weapon against dangerous pathogens were taken from us ... (It would mean) that we could lose a weapon against even minor infectious diseases," Groehe said. Reuters

Global health spending good for U.S. security and economy, National Academies say

15 May - If a serious infectious disease blossomed across the globe today, the U.S. death redesigns to soft armor vests that have "resulted in or will result in" a cut of 6 to 7 pounds, according to the report. ... The report noted Marine tests using aerial delivery that could bring 700 pounds of gear to units in hard-to-reach places. The Army has ongoing testing and development on smaller all-terrain vehicles and autonomous support systems that follow soldiers and carry their supplies. Army Times

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Since the activation of the MEDPROS Hearing Readiness Classification (HRC) 4B and HRC 4C logic on or about 18 February 2017, the potential for reference test discrepancies between the Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System-Hearing Conservation Data Repository (DOEHRS-HC DR) and the DOEHRS-HC desktop application became more apparent. Because of the potential for a discrepancy between the systems, it is possible for the DOEHRS-HC DR to identify a significant threshold shift (STS) when the DOEHRS-HC desktop application does not based upon recordkeeping practices (i.e., if the incorrect baseline test is being used by DOEHRS-HC). MEDPROS will recognize a Soldier as HRC 4B or HRC 4C, if the authoritative system, the DOEHRS-HC DR, identifies an STS.

More than half of world's deaths still have no recorded cause: WHO

17 May - More than half of all deaths have no recorded cause, making effective health monitoring and policymaking far more difficult, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday. However, improved collection of statistics meant that 27 million of the world’s 56 million estimated deaths in 2015 were registered with a cause compared with only about a third in 2005, the U.N. health agency’s latest global health report said. The WHO said several countries, including China and Turkey, had made “significant strides” in data collection. In Iran, it said, 90 percent of deaths are now recorded with details of the causes, compared with 5 percent in 1999. Reuters

Need for mental health providers in progressive tinnitus management

May 2017 - ... There is no cure for tinnitus, meaning there is no proven method to permanently eliminate or even reduce the perception of tinnitus. Intervention for tinnitus therefore is limited to methods intended to mitigate reactions to tinnitus. ... Tinnitus research at the VA National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research (NCRAR) has led to the development and refinement of an interdisciplinary program called Progressive Tinnitus Management (PTM). Audiologists and MH providers work together to deliver portions of the protocol. ... The PTM program involves 5 stepped-care levels of management, and patients receive only the levels they need. ... [R]ecent [randomized controlled trials] have validated the effectiveness of PTM and demonstrated that PTM should be considered for the practice of evidence-based tinnitus management. Federal Practitioner

Scientists discover human antibodies to fight Ebola virus

18 May - Scientists have discovered a possible cure for all five known Ebola viruses, one of which ravaged West Africa in recent years. The so-called broadly neutralizing antibodies were discovered in the blood of a survivor of the West African epidemic, which ran from late 2013 to mid-2016. ... Kartik Chandran, a professor in the Department of Microbiology and
Immunology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bronx, New York, helped identify the antibodies, which were described online in the journal Cell. He is optimistic that the antibodies can be used as a single therapy to treat all Ebola viruses. "Based on the nonhuman primate studies that are ongoing, and given the fact that they are pretty predictive, I would be optimistic that they could be used to protect people and reverse disease," Chandran said. VOA

**Study: Nursing movements contribute to N95 face seal leakage**

17 May - Movements during routine nursing procedures can increase the risk of face seal leakage of N95 respirators, according to a study that involved nursing students who wore backpack aerosol spectrometers that measured particles that entered the mask. ... The study group consisted of 120 nursing students who were equipped with the best-fitting respirators among three common models using the quantitative fit test (QNFT). They performed nursing procedures such as breathing, talking, and bending over for 10-minute periods while wearing the portable spectrometers to detect particles inside the respirator. Fit factor determined by QNFT dropped significantly after nursing procedures, and the researchers also saw significant differences in particle concentration of different sizes inside the respirators, as detected by the backpack spectrometers, before, during, and after the procedures. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

**Why is the world suffering from a penicillin shortage?**

18 May - ... At least 18 countries, including the US, Canada, Portugal, France and Brazil, have faced shortages of benzathine penicillin G over the past three years, according to the World Health Organization. In the US, a year-long shortage of benzathine penicillin G has made treating syphilis - a disease that is growing in prevalence - more difficult. In Brazil, a three-year shortage of benzathine penicillin G came amid an outbreak of syphilis, a disease linked to severe malformation in babies. The antibiotic is the only drug that can kill the syphilis bacteria in the fetus. ... In an attempt to tackle the shortage, Brazil last year imported an emergency stock of 2.7 million vials of benzathine penicillin G. ... Just four companies produce the active ingredient for penicillin - a drug that changed modern medicine 76 years ago - and because the medicine offers little profit, those companies keep production levels low. As penicillin has been used to treat diseases, such as syphilis and rheumatic heart disease, which disproportionately affect poorer countries, the extent of the demand for the drug also isn't always clearly captured. Al Jazeera

**ZIKA VIRUS**

**Brazil declares end to Zika emergency**

12 May - Yesterday Brazil's Ministry of Health lifted the state of emergency caused by the Zika virus, due to the country's dwindling case counts of the mosquito-borne disease. Brazil
was the country hardest hit by the 2016 Zika epidemic, and continues to report the most cases of congenital birth defects, including microcephaly, associated with prenatal exposure to the virus. But this year has seen a dramatic reduction in case counts: From Jan 1 to Apr 15, the country reported 7,911 Zika cases. During the same time period in 2016, Brazil tallied 170,535 cases. That is a 95.5% reduction in cases. **CIDRAP News Scan** (first item)

**Sanofi rejects U.S. Army request for ‘fair’ pricing for a Zika vaccine**

17 May - Sanofi Pasteur has rejected a request from the U.S. Army to set an affordable US price for a Zika virus vaccine that the company is developing with American taxpayer funds, prompting an angry response from Senator Bernie Sanders. For months, Sanders has pushed the Army to negotiate a more favorable agreement with Sanofi, which is one of the world’s largest vaccine makers and which has already received a $43 million U.S. research grant. But Sanofi recently refused, according to an Army timeline of events reviewed by STAT. The rejection comes amid negotiations the Army is holding to grant Sanofi a license to make and sell a Zika vaccine. But the prospect of giving Sanofi an exclusive license to sell a potential blockbuster — depending upon how extensively the virus travels — at whatever price it wants, has upset various lawmakers and advocacy groups, who are pressing the Army to insist on affordable pricing. As a result, the deal, which could provide the company with another $130 million in government funds, has sparked still wider debate about pricing for products that are discovered with U.S. taxpayer dollars. **STAT**

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**INFLUENZA**

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

During week 18 (April 30-May 6, 2017), influenza activity decreased in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 18 was influenza B. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories decreased.

- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.

- **Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths:** Two influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. **CDC**
ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 18/2017 (1 – 7 May 2017)

- Influenza activity across the region remained low, with all 37 reporting countries reporting low influenza activity.
- The proportion of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza viruses was 12%, an apparent increase from 10% in the previous week. However, influenza viruses were only detected in 5 countries and numbers were low.
- All sentinel detections were type B viruses and their numbers have declined since week 15/2017. European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

2017 Week 18 (through 6 May 2017):

- Influenza: One case of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees at NRTC Great Lakes.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at Fort Benning, NRTC Great Lakes, and MCRD San Diego. Naval Health Research Center

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

During 23 April - 6 May 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 17 & 18), a total of 103 specimens were collected and received from 29 locations. Results were finalized for 71 specimens from 26 locations. During Week 17, four influenza A(H3N2) and nine influenza B viruses were identified. During Week 18, one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, one influenza A(H3N2), and seven influenza B viruses were identified. Approximately 20% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 17. Approximately 24% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 18. The influenza percent positive for the season is currently 36%. US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

U.S.: Health worker survey reveals many work during flu illness

17 May - An Internet survey of healthcare workers during the 2014-15 flu season found that about 40% of them worked while they were sick with influenza-like illness (ILI). The final analysis included 1,914 healthcare workers, of which 21.6% (414) said they had been sick with ILI. Of those who said they had been ill, 41.4% said they had worked while sick, for a median duration of 3 days. Of eight different occupation types, pharmacists and physicians had the highest frequency of working while they had ILI. Hospital-based health providers were more likely to work while sick compared with those not working in a hospital. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)
WHO: Influenza Update

15 May - Influenza activity in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere continued to decrease. In the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity reached seasonal thresholds in some countries, but remained low in general. Worldwide, influenza B viruses were predominant. WHO

With bird flu surging, U.S. needs to do more to prevent possible pandemic, GAO says

11 May - If the United States were suddenly facing a potential avian influenza pandemic, just one U.S. manufacturer could be counted on to make human pandemic flu vaccine here. And although the chickens that lay the eggs used in the process are themselves susceptible to the virus, until an emergency arises only voluntary and often inadequate measures by poultry producers are in place to protect flocks, according to a new Government Accountability Office report. The Washington Post

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Anthrax sickens six slaughterhouse workers in Thika, Kenya

13 May - Six meat loaders from the city of Thika in eastern Kenya have been hospitalized due to suspected anthrax infections, according to a Daily Nation report. ... The report states: The first patient is said to have been pricked by a bone as he worked at the slaughter house while the three others are said to have come into skin contact with an infected carcass. It is not yet clear where the other two got infected. The county government has dispatched public health and veterinary officers to all abattoirs in the area to establish the source of the disease and take precautionary measures to curb the spread of disease. In addition, the public is advised against consuming meat which is not inspected by the authorities. Outbreak News Today

WELLNESS

Making drug use a crime makes HIV prevention, treatment more difficult

15 May - The criminalization of drug use has a negative effect on efforts to prevent the
spread of HIV and to treat people with the infection, suggests a review of published research. ... The findings ... suggest that the so-called War on Drugs, which called for stiff penalties for possession of illegal drugs, has been unsuccessful in reducing drug use and has put thousands of people in jail who might be better served through drug treatment. ... The researchers systematically reviewed 106 peer-reviewed studies published between January 2006 and December 2014 on criminalization and HIV prevention or treatment among people who use injection drugs. “More than 80 percent of the studies evaluating the criminalization of drug use demonstrated worse health outcomes among those targeted by these laws and their communities at large,” says one of the study’s leaders.

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News

Morning daylight exposure tied to a good night’s sleep

18 May - Workers who are exposed to sunlight or bright indoor lights during the morning hours sleep better at night and tend to feel less depressed and stressed than those who don’t get much morning light, according to a recent study. Exposure to more light during the day and less light at night is critical for healthy sleep patterns because it helps to calibrate the body’s internal “circadian” clock, the study team writes in the journal Sleep Health. ... [T]he study team recruited participants in five government office buildings across the United States. A total of 109 employees working at the offices wore light-measuring devices for one week in summertime to gauge their exposure to different types of light throughout the day, and 81 of these participants repeated the experiment in winter as well. ... Researchers found that people who were exposed to greater amounts of light during the morning hours, between 8 a.m. and Noon, fell asleep more quickly at night and had fewer sleep disturbances during the night compared to those exposed to low light in the morning.

Reuters

'Performance enhancing drugs' considered for Special Operations soldiers

16 May - Special Operations Command wants to create super-soldiers through pushing the limits of human performance, and it’s looking to nutritional supplements and even performance enhancing drugs as options. ... U.S. Special Operations Command is looking to go even further, pushing operators to increase pain tolerance, injury prevention and recovery, and physical performance in austere environments. SOCOM is looking to private industry and academia for ideas to get them there. “If there are ... different ways of training, different ways of acquiring performance that are non-material, that’s preferred but in a lot of cases we’ve exhausted those areas,” said Ben Chitty, senior project manager for biomedical, human performance and canine portfolios in the Science and Technology office at USSOCOM. “For performance enhancing drugs, we’ll have to look at the makeup and safety in consultation with our surgeon and the medical folks before making any decisions on it,” he said. Defense News
Plant chemicals hope for 'alternative contraceptives'

16 May - Two compounds normally found in wild plants could make good alternatives to emergency contraceptives - if scientists only knew where to get enough of them. Chemicals from dandelion root and the "thunder god vine" plant have long been used in traditional medicines. Now, Californian researchers have found they can also block fertilisation. A UK sperm expert said the discovery could lead to a new and novel approach to male contraception. But the compounds existed at such low levels in plants that the cost of extraction was very high, the US team said. In tests, chemicals called pristimerin and lupeol stopped fertilisation by preventing human sperm from whipping its tail and propelling itself towards and into the woman's egg. ... In other words, they successfully blocked progesterone - which triggers the sperm’s forceful swimming - but didn't damage the sperm. ... The researchers found that the chemicals worked at very low doses and had no side-effects either, unlike hormone-based contraceptives. BBC News

Red meat increases risk of dying from 9 diseases

15 May - The more red meat you eat, the greater your risk of dying from one of nine diseases, according to a new report. Researchers studied more than 536,000 men and women ages 50 to 71, tracking their diet and health for an average of 16 years. They recorded intake of total meat, processed and unprocessed red meat (beef, lamb and pork), and white meat (poultry and fish). Compared with the one-fifth of people who ate the least red meat, the one-fifth who ate the most had a 26 percent increased risk of death from various causes. High red meat consumption increased the rate of dying from cancer, heart disease, respiratory disease, stroke, diabetes, infections, Alzheimer’s disease, kidney disease and liver disease. The New York Times

Risks, benefits of vaping debated at U.S. e-cig summit

13 May - The big ongoing debate about e-cigarettes -- public health threat that could lead a new generation to smoking, or an aid to adult smokers kicking the habit? -- took center stage here this week at the first-ever U.S. E-Cigarette Summit. Anti-smoking advocates, tobacco researchers, and representatives from the cigarette and vaping industries met to discuss, among other topics, the current research exploring the risks and benefits of e-cigarettes, FDA regulation over the e-cigarette industry, and current efforts in the U.S. Congress to roll back these regulations. Kenneth E. Warner, PhD, of the University of Michigan School of Public Health, framed the debate between those he called the "e-cigarette skeptics," who focus on the potential risks to children and the "e-cigarette enthusiasts," who believe the products represent a novel new tool for smoking cessation and harm reduction. MedPage Today
Self-sourced abortion deemed safe in Irish study

17 May - Early medical abortion provided through online telemedicine was highly effective for women in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, researchers reported. Among a cohort of 1,000 women, virtually all of them (99.2%, 95% CI 98.4%-99.7%) reported having ended their pregnancies and 94.7% (93.1% to 96.0%) reported a successful medical abortion without surgical intervention. "The biggest take away from this is that self-sourced medication abortion conducted entirely outside the formal healthcare setting can be safe and effective. Moreover, women are highly capable of managing their own abortions and seeking medical attention when the need arises." MedPage Today

Study finds tens of millions of Americans drink alcohol at dangerously high levels

17 May - Nearly 32 million adults in the United States (13 percent of the U.S. population aged 18 and older) consumed more than twice the number of drinks considered binge drinking on at least one occasion, according to a 2013 survey that asked about past-year drinking. ... The current study analyzed three levels of past-year binge drinking - Levels I, II, and III. These levels were defined as four to seven drinks, eight to 11 drinks, and 12 or more drinks on a single occasion for women; and five to nine drinks, 10-14 drinks, and 15 or more drinks on a single occasion for men. ... The researchers found that ... 39 percent of adult males and 27 percent of adult females reported Level I binge drinking during the previous year. Eleven percent of males reported Level II binge drinking (two times the binge drinking threshold for adult males) at least once in the past year, and 7 percent reported Level III binge drinking (three times the binge threshold) at least once in the past year. Five percent of females reported Level II binge drinking (two times the binge drinking threshold for adult females) at least once in the past year, and 3 percent reported Level III binge drinking (three times the binge threshold) at least once in the past year. NIH

Sunrise gives mental health patients AI-guarded group chat

15 May - Sunrise Health is a new startup aiming to improve healthcare by combining the constant support of group chat, the openness afforded by anonymity, the guidance of professional therapists and the safeguard of artificial intelligence watching for abuse and emergencies. Today, Sunrise Health came out of stealth to present at TechCrunch Disrupt NY's Startup Battlefield competition. It unveiled the beta version of its group chat therapy app that's free for patients, and licensed as software-as-a-service to healthcare providers. Tech Crunch
Democratic Republic of the Congo: WHO notes 19 suspected Ebola cases in the DRC

16 May - Today the World Health Organization (WHO) said there were an additional 2 new cases of suspected Ebola virus disease in a remote northern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This raised the total number of cases to 19, with 3 deaths likely caused by the deadly disease. ... As of yesterday, the WHO said the case-fatality rate is 15.8%. The cases reported are from three areas in northern DRC: Nambwa (10 cases and 2 deaths), Mouma (3 cases and 1 death), and Ngay (6 cases and no death). A total of 125 contacts of the 19 suspected cases have been identified and are being followed daily. The external report said there are six patients currently hospitalized, and that WHO and local health officials were working to disinfect materials and homes of patients and put in place safe burial practices. Only five samples from suspected patients have been subjected to laboratory testing, with two confirming infection with the Ebola Zaire subtype. CIDRAP

Democratic Republic of the Congo: UN health agency deploying technical experts to site of Ebola outbreak in DR Congo

15 May – The United Nations health agency is deploying technical experts to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) amid an outbreak of Ebola virus near its northern border with the Central Africa Republic, the agency’s regional director for Africa confirmed. ... He noted that the UN World Health Organization (WHO) has already mobilized teams, and is also ready to provide the technical expertise and leadership required to mount a coordinated and effective response. The visit follows notification by the Government of an outbreak in the Likati health zone, in the north. At least three people have died, as of Saturday, and eight additional people are reported to have Ebola. A Ministry of Health team, supported by the WHO, is scheduled to arrive in the epicenter of the outbreak today. “The health zone is situated in the remote, isolated and hard-to-reach northern part of the country, with limited transport and communication networks - factors that all impeded transmission of information about the suspected outbreak,” WHO said in a press release. UN News Centre

Somalia: Cholera outbreak compounds hunger crisis in southern Somalia

16 May - A regional drought has displaced more than half a million people in Somalia and left the country at risk of famine. A cholera outbreak is further complicating relief efforts, in particular in the southern part of the country where some villages remain under al-Shabab control. Bay Regional Hospital, the biggest in the southwest federal state, is filled with patients suffering from stomach pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. Cholera has sickened more
than 40,000 people in Somalia since December. More than half of the cases have been in this state. Most of the victims have been malnourished children. VOA

Tanzania: U.S. pledges $526 million aid in 2017 to Tanzania to fight AIDS

18 May - The United States on Thursday approved $526 million aid to Tanzania over the coming year to expand the roll out of life-prolonging anti-retroviral drugs to people infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Some 1.4 million Tanzanians are estimated to be living with HIV in the nation of around 50 million people, with about 850,000 of them currently on anti-retrovirals (ARVs). "This support will bring the total number of Tanzanians on HIV treatment up to 1.2 million," the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania said in a statement. The funds were donated through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the world's largest provider of AIDS-fighting medicine. Reuters

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Iran: Magnitude 5.7 earthquake in NE Iran kills 3, injures 200

14 May - Iranian state TV is reporting a strong magnitude 5.7 earthquake has left three people dead and about 200 injured in a remote area in the country's northeast. The quake that struck late Saturday jolted the town of Pishqaleh, a farming region close to the Turkmenistan border, with a population of about 2,000 people, some 498 miles northeast of the capital Tehran. Fox 29

Syria: Investigators probe acute flaccid paralysis cluster in Syria

15 May - Health officials are investigating a cluster of 23 acute flaccid paralysis cases in Syria, and test results on one of the samples suggests potential vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV), ProMED Mail reported on May 12, based on a submission from an anonymous source that it says is known and reliable. Samples were apparently sent to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for further testing. Authorities are worried that the virus is a circulating VDPV (cVDPV) type 2. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

Tajikistan: Measles outbreak -sharp increase in new cases is expected to continue

16 May - The measles outbreak that began in mid-April in Rudaki district, Tajikistan, has grown to 345 cases through May 1, according to the International Federation of Red Cross
And Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The outbreak has now spread to the capital city of Dushanbe and the surrounding districts as well as Khatlon oblast and the trend of sharp increase in new cases is expected to continue. The group most affected by the epidemic are children between 1 to 9 years of age. Approximately 84 percent of the patients are reported as being unvaccinated. Outbreak News Today

Yemen: Why a man is on an IV in his car outside a hospital in Yemen

15 May - On Monday, authorities in Yemen declared a state of emergency due to a sharp rise in cholera deaths. Yemen has been at war for more than two years — a Saudi-led coalition has been battling Shiite Houthi rebels aligned with Iran — leaving a reported 10,000 dead. The fighting has decimated much of the country's infrastructure, including its medical facilities. The World Health Organization said in April that fewer than half of Yemen's medical centers were functioning to capacity. ... The latest figures in the cholera outbreak show that there have been more than 11,000 cases, 187 people have died and the disease seems to be spreading like wildfire. ... Not only were 8,000 people killed in the conflict and 44,000 wounded, in addition there is all the vital infrastructure like public services — health, water, sewage, sanitation, garbage collection — that are running dangerously low and creating conditions for the spread of the disease. ... I visited two hospitals, actually, and both have received hundreds of new cases of people affected by watery diarrhea and suspected cholera. ... We saw up to four people in one single hospital bed. Patients waiting in the garden outside. I even saw one man was sitting in his car with an IV drip attached to his window because there was no place in the hospital. NPR

Spain: Spain's smoking ban tied to drop in preterm and underweight babies

17 May - One year after a nationwide ban on smoking in public took effect in Spain, women had significantly fewer premature or underweight infants, a recent study suggests. Researchers examined data on more than 5 million babies born in Spain from 2000 to 2013. The study included infants born before any restrictions on public tobacco use, after a 2006 ban covering many workplaces with exceptions in the hospitality industry, and after a 2011 law curbing tobacco in nearly all public places. The rate of babies born small for their gestational age declined after the partial smoking ban took effect in 2006, researchers report in Pediatrics. With the comprehensive ban in 2011, rates of preterm and low-
United Kingdom: Why ‘WannaCry’ malware caused chaos for National Health Service in U.K.

17 May - Why would doctors rely on computers running ancient software? Last week’s worldwide cyberattack potentially put lives at risk by paralyzing computers at state-run medical facilities across the U.K. … Thousands of operations and appointments had to be canceled as the “WannaCry” malware threatened to delete crucial files unless ransoms of $300 and $600 were paid. It may seem obvious that hospitals would have robust cybersecurity strategies to prevent any such disruptions. However, the National Health Service (NHS) is a radically different beast from the U.S. healthcare system. … Unlike in America, where treatment can result in hefty medical bills, the government-run NHS treats people for free. … For critics of the U.K.’s right-wing Conservative government, the health service succumbed to “WannaCry” due to a lack of funding. … Around one-fifth of NHS trusts — the regional bodies that run British hospitals — were affected by the cyberattack. The malware was able to jump from computer to computer by targeting a weakness in older versions of Windows, as well as more recent systems that hadn’t been updated. NBC News

U.S.: Assessing the status of personal protective equipment

17 May - The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has been gathering information about storage conditions and inventory for personal protective equipment (PPE) in federal, state, municipal, county, and hospital system stockpiles. Maintaining the stockpiles for public health emergencies, such as infectious disease outbreaks, is a “significant cost and time investment,” NIOSH says. That investment includes restocking and leasing or purchasing environmentally controlled storage space. NIOSH asked for comments on how facilities monitor respirator and gown deterioration, how they rotate PPE, and the degree to which environmental controls are implemented and maintained. Even when resources exist to store PPE per the manufacturer’s recommendations, NIOHS says, “the influence of long-term storage time alone or PPE performance has been questioned.” Federal Practitioner

U.S.: CDC Health Alert Network (HAN) Health Advisory about potential for falsely low blood lead test results from LeadCare® analyzers

17 May - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a safety communication
warning about the use of Magellan Diagnostics’ LeadCare® analyzers (LeadCare, LeadCare II, LeadCare Ultra and LeadCare Plus) with venous blood samples because they might result in falsely low test results. FDA is now advising that Magellan Diagnostics’ LeadCare® analyzers should no longer be used with venous blood samples. The safety alert does not apply to capillary blood lead test results collected by fingerstick or heelstick. The purpose of this Health Advisory is to notify state and local health departments, healthcare providers, and laboratories about CDC’s re-testing guidance in light of the safety alert. CDC

U.S.: EPA nixed ban on pesticide linked to sickened farm workers

17 May - Almost 50 farm workers in Bakersfield, Calif. experienced gastrointestinal symptoms including nausea and vomiting after coming into contact with a pesticide whose use the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials were prevented from further restricting. The farm workers were exposed to Vulcan, whose primary ingredient is chlorpyrifos, when it was sprayed at a neighboring farm and then drifted in the wind to the farm at which they were working. Chlorpyrifos has been linked to developmental problems in children and is already banned by the EPA for indoor use. The agency had earlier proposed widening the ban, but current EPA administrator Scott Pruitt changed course, saying there were "scientific gaps" in the proposal. MedPage Today

U.S.: Measles outbreak total hits 60

17 May - Two new cases of measles have been reported in the state, according to the Minnesota Department of Health website. That brings the total number of cases diagnosed in the state in the current outbreak to 60, the most since 1990 when 460 cases were diagnosed in Minnesota, leading to three fatalities. ... Fifty-seven of the cases have come in individuals confirmed to have been unvaccinated. One individual had one dose of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. Two individuals had two doses. A total of 57 cases have come in children ages 0-17. Three have been adults, and 50 of the cases have come in the Somali Minnesotan community. WDAY

U.S.: Path to end HIV could be within reach for United States

15 May - The United States could be on track within the next decade to see significant steps towards ending the HIV epidemic in this country. ... The researchers say their findings reveal that, with adequate commitment, a path exists to eliminate domestic HIV infection through the achievement of critical milestones — specifically, the reduction of annual new infections to 21,000 by 2020 and to 12,000 by 2025. They say that if these goals were met, 2025 could be the turning point for the epidemic, when HIV prevalence, or the total number of people living with HIV in the United States, would start to decline. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News
U.S.: Pool infections linked to parasitic poop on the rise

18 May - Outbreaks caused by the parasite Cryptosporidium, which is often seen in swimming pools, have more than doubled from 2014 to 2106, CDC researchers reported. Writing in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, the authors said that at least 32 outbreaks caused by "Crypto" were reported to the CDC in 2016 compared to 16 outbreaks just 2 years prior. Crypto infection causes diarrhea, cramps, nausea and vomiting. ... They characterized "Crypto" as the most common cause of diarrheal illness linked to swimming pools and water playgrounds because it is not killed by chlorine and can survive for up to 10 days in pool water. MedPage Today

U.S.: Racial and ethnic disparities persist in sudden infant deaths

15 May - American Indian and Alaska Native families are much more likely to have an infant die suddenly and unexpectedly, and that risk has remained higher than in other ethnic groups since public health efforts were launched to prevent sudden infant death syndrome in the 1990s. African-American babies also face a higher risk, a study finds. American Indians and Alaska Natives had a rate of 177.6 sudden unexplained infant deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013 (down from 237.5 per 100,000 in 1995) compared with 172.4 for non-Hispanic blacks (down from 203), 84.5 for non-Hispanic whites (down from 93), 49.3 for Hispanics (down from 62.7) and 28.3 for Asians and Pacific Islanders (down from 59.3). The declines were statistically significant only among non-Hispanic blacks, Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders. NPR

U.S.: Study identifies rare superbug strain in Houston

16 May - A study today of patients with Klebsiella pneumoniae infections in one of the nation's largest cities has found that a relatively rare strain of the hospital superbug was responsible for more than one third of resistant K pneumoniae infections. In mBio, researchers report that 35.7% of 1,777 drug-resistant K pneumoniae strains cultured from patients at Houston’s Methodist Hospital System belonged to clonal group 307 (CG307), a clade—or subgroup—of strains that's been sporadically identified in other parts of the world but about which little is known. A little more than a fourth of the infections (26.7%) were caused by CG258, the clonal group responsible for most of the drug-resistant K pneumoniae infections in the United States. CIDRAP

U.S.: The Secretary’s Ventures Fund announces 2017 projects

17 May - Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, M.D. today announced the selection of five entrepreneurial projects for investment by the Secretary’s Ventures Fund (HHS Ventures). The projects were chosen from across HHS and are part of the latest round of funding and support designed to advance the Department’s innovation agenda. ... The projects selected by HHS Ventures represent critical areas of opportunity in improving the
efficiency of the Department and include:

- Optimizing Cyber-Molecular Surveillance of Viral Hepatitis
- The Fight against Zika: Leveraging Health Information Technology
- Internet Devices to Improve Animal Care
- Electronic Signature Capture and Data Transfer
- Streamlining Acquisition of Lab Supplies

**U.S.: U.S. heart disease deaths drop but wide variation by county remains**

16 May - Deaths from cardiovascular disease have dropped by half in the U.S. over the past generation, but in some regions the risk of dying from some common heart ailments is twice what it is in other places, a study finds. Nationwide, for every 100,000 people, the number of deaths from cardiovascular diseases dropped from about 507 in 1980 to roughly 253 in 2014, researchers report in *JAMA*. When researchers compared mortality rates in the worst 10 percent of counties and the best 10 percent of counties, they found that differences between the two sets of counties was nearly 15 percent narrower now than it had been 35 years ago. Still, they found, large differences remained. ... The largest concentration of counties with high cardiovascular disease mortality extended from southeastern Oklahoma along the Mississippi River Valley to eastern Kentucky. ... The lowest cardiovascular mortality rates were found in the counties surrounding San Francisco, central Colorado, northern Nebraska, central Minnesota, northeastern Virginia, and southern Florida. *Reuters*

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Cambodia/Japan: How a tsunami in Japan endangered children in Cambodia

15 May - The tsunami and nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, now threatens the developing brains of children in Cambodia. ... Cambodia has long struggled with iodine deficiency. ... But there is a cheap, easy remedy: iodized salt. ... Cambodia was making great progress against iodine deficiency until 2011. ... In 2010, Unicef and other donors turned responsibility for iodination over to the government and salt producers. Enforcement grew lax, and spraying machines that broke went unrepaired. Then in 2011, after the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, the global price of iodine tripled. ... A third of the world's iodine is produced by Japan's natural gas drillers, who extract it from brine pumped from coastal wells. ... The catastrophe damaged wells, set refineries ablaze and sharply cut electricity output. Adding to the problem, the release of radioactive iodine from the Fukushima nuclear reactor set off panic buying of protective potassium iodide pills. ... Prices briefly
reached 50 times their normal levels. … Noniodized salt from Vietnam was half the cost, so it was smuggled in. … Unicef is urging the government to enforce its own laws and do better testing. The New York Times

China: Lack of dust makes China's air pollution much worse

12 May - Airborne dust is normally seen as an environmental problem, but the lack of it is making air pollution over China considerably worse. A new study suggests less dust means more solar radiation hits the land surface, which reduces wind speed. That lack of wind in turn leads to an accumulation of air pollution over heavily populated parts of China. The researchers found that reduced dust levels cause a 13% increase in human-made pollution in the region. … Using models to simulate 150 years of wind and dust patterns in the region, the researchers found that the dust deflects significant amounts of sunlight. Without it, more heat from the Sun hits the land. Differences in the temperatures between land and sea cause the winds to blow. Without the dust, the land warms up more and that changes the temperature differential with the sea leading to weaker breezes - and more air pollution. BBC News

China: Scarlet fever in Hong Kong - cases rise significantly in recent years

18 May - Before 2011, the annual number of scarlet fever cases reported in Hong Kong was typically below 250, according to the Department of Health. However, since the outbreak in the first half of 2011, Hong Kong has reported no less than 1100 cases through 2016. And 2017 is off to high numbers in the first months. From the beginning of the year through April, Hong Kong health officials reported 780 scarlet fever cases, including 24 institutional clusters involving 17 kindergartens/child care centres and seven primary schools, and 13 household clusters. Outbreak News Today

India: Fake medical news can now be fact-checked in India

12 May - #fakenews isn't just a U.S. thing. And it isn't just about politics. In India people are putting their health at risk by following spurious advice dispensed on forwards on Whatsapp, the phone-based messaging app. Here's one popular hoax making the rounds: an image of a blister pack of pills, warning recipients to avoid certain brands of the pain reliever acetaminophen because “doctors advise that it contains 'Machupo' virus, one of the most dangerous viruses in the world, with a high mortality rate.” … Dr. Ranjit Mankeshwar, a professor of preventative medicine in one of Mumbai's leading medical colleges, says he gets asked about information sourced from Whatsapp frequently. … To address this insidious tide of misinformation, two software engineers have set up Check4Spam, the Snopes of India. The site, founded by Shammas Oliyath and Bal Krishn Birla in Bangalore, publishes rebuttals and research for the medical misinformation being forwarded on
Whatsapp. "We receive 200-odd messages a day" asking if information in a WhatsApp message is correct, says Oliyath, who handles the fact-checking and general myth-busting. Brla handles the technology and traffic promotion. NPR

Philippines: Philippines' Duterte gets tough on tobacco with ban on smoking in public

18 May - Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has signed an executive order banning smoking in public across the second-most populous country in Southeast Asia, one of the region's strictest anti-tobacco laws. The ban, which carries a maximum penalty of four months in jail and a fine of 5,000 pesos ($100), covers both indoor and outdoor smoking, presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said on Thursday. It also covers existing bans on tobacco advertisements, promotions or sponsorship, which are subject to fines of up to 400,000 pesos and maximum jail terms of three years and possible revocation of business permits. ... Designated smoking areas not larger than 10 sq m (12 sq yards) will be set up for adults only and must be at least 10 meters (11 yards) from building entrances or exits, according to the order signed on Tuesday. Police-led anti-smoking task forces will be created in towns and cities. Reuters

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Brazil: Brazil's outbreak yellow fever virus has mutated significantly

16 May - The yellow fever virus that has caused a large outbreak in Brazil has undergone substantial mutations, but these changes should not affect vaccine effectiveness, Brazilian investigators said, according to a story today in Brazil's O Globo newspaper. A Google-translated version of the report says that scientists from the nation's public health research center, Oswaldo Cruz Institute /Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (IOC/Fiocruz) have sequenced the complete genome of the yellow fever virus from two howler monkeys from Espirito Santo state. They describe eight mutations never before reported in this lineage. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

Venezuela: Venezuela replaces health minister after data shows crisis worsening

12 May - President Nicolas Maduro has abruptly dismissed Venezuela’s health minister days after the government broke a nearly two-year silence on data that showed the country’s medical crisis significantly worsening. Gynecologist Antonieta Caporale, who held the post for just over four months, was replaced by pharmacist Luis Lopez, the government said.
Ministry data published this week showed cases of infant mortality rose 30 percent and maternal mortality 65 percent, while malaria shot up 76 percent last year. There was also a jump in illnesses such as diphtheria and Zika. In the fourth year of a brutal recession, Venezuela is suffering widespread shortages of medicines and basic medical equipment. A leading pharmaceutical association has said the country is running short on roughly 85 percent of medicines. Reuters