20 October 2017

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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Contents

U.S. MILITARY

- Army vice chief: Soldiers are like professional athletes, so let’s train like them
- Big Pharma funded anti-US militia in Iraq, US veterans allege in lawsuit
- Early numbers show the Army’s new fitness test is reducing injuries in basic training
- How the U.S. Army redesigned its mental health system
- Military women, too, should serve unmolested
- Social support critical for military mental health

GLOBAL

- Amid fear and guns, polio finds a refuge
- Firefighters exposed to carcinogens through the skin
- Global antibiotic resistance tracking project launched
- Heading off the post-antibiotic age
- How a healthy economy can shorten life spans
- Motorbikes, trust and pepper soup: Ebola tips to tackle deadly diseases
- Should donor sex influence blood transfusion practices?

INFLUENZA

- ECDC: Flu News Europe
- Flu trends in VA system correspond to national trends
- NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report
- USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program
- WHO: Influenza Update

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

- Autopsy ordered amidst large outbreak in Louisiana
- Five military dogs receive Medal of Courage
- McDonald’s South Korea office raided in burger probe: reports
- Twentynine Palms commissary closed indefinitely for rodent problem
WELLNESS

- Fatty liver disease fastest-growing reason for transplants in young U.S. adults
- More men than women infected with oral human papillomavirus
- Scientists zero in on a new target for obesity
- Sleep scientist warns against walking through life 'in an underslept state'
- U.S. indicts major Chinese traffickers for selling fentanyl online

USAFRICOM

- Madagascar: Plague total grows in Madagascar as response builds
- Nigeria: Three cases of monkeypox confirmed in Nigeria
- Seychelles: Plague ruled out in Seychelles but islands on guard
- Uganda: Uganda confirms one death from Ebola-like Marburg virus

USCENTCOM

- Saudi Arabia identifies new MERS cases linked to camels
- Syria: WHO says attack on Syria vaccine store leaves children at risk
- Yemen: How Yemen’s cholera outbreak became the fastest growing in modern history

USEUCOM

- Europe: ‘This is very alarming!’ Flying insects vanish from nature preserves
- Ireland: Ireland reckons with damage from its deadliest storm for decades
- Ukraine: Ukraine passes long-delayed health reforms praised by West

USNORTHCOM

- U.S.: Backyard chicken trend causes spike in infections, 1 fatal
- U.S.: California declares hepatitis A outbreak an emergency
- U.S.: Cleanup from California fires poses environmental and health risks
- U.S.: Drug companies make eyedrops too big, and you pay for the waste
- U.S.: EPA says higher radiation levels pose ‘no harmful health effect’
- U.S.: Insurance a major factor in blacks’ higher breast cancer mortality
- U.S.: New NIOSH center to study safety and health implications of occupational robots
- U.S.: Scott Pruitt suggests he will restrict scientists who get EPA grants from advising the agency
- U.S.: Trump’s drug czar nominee out after “60 Minutes” opioid report
- HURRICANE AFTERMATH
- U.S.: Desperate Puerto Ricans line up for water — at a hazardous-waste site
- U.S.: Solar industry wants to build Puerto Rico’s grid of the future
- U.S.: State health officials extend Harvey food assistance program
- U.S.: There’s a hospital ship waiting for sick Puerto Ricans -- but no one knows how to get on it
- U.S.: The storm has passed, but Puerto Rico’s health faces prolonged recovery
- U.S.: U.S. Virgin Islands - Leptospirosis case confirmed on St. Thomas

USPACOM

- Asia: Studies show rise in drug-resistant TB in India, China
- India: Fear of toxic smog leads India to limit Diwali fireworks
- Vietnam: Vietnam on flood alert again

USSOUTHCOM

- Dominica: Exodus from hurricane-hit Dominica as recovery remains elusive
Army vice chief: Soldiers are like professional athletes, so let’s train like them

15 October - With the implementation of the Occupational Physical Assessment Test and the piloting of the Army Combat Readiness Test, the Army is in the midst of a push toward fitness standards that better reflect the strength and agility needed on the battlefield. Part of that move, officials say, should start at the unit level, with a holistic approach to fitness that includes nutrition, recovery and preventive physical therapy. “If we take a look at what professional sports teams do, we have incredible young men and women, and if it’s good enough for the National Football League or professional baseball players,” then it’s something the Army should consider, said Gen. James McConville, the Army vice chief of staff. The head of the Center for Initial Military Training has floated the idea of having professional trainers and nutritionists available to every soldier, and McConville echoed that.

Army Times

Big Pharma funded anti-US militia in Iraq, US veterans allege in lawsuit

18 October - U.S. and European drug companies indirectly yet knowingly funded Iran-backed Iraqi militias that carried out attacks against U.S. troops, veterans of the Iraq War alleged in a lawsuit filed Tuesday. The lawsuit alleges that five drug companies won contracts with the Iraqi government during the 2003 peak of the war with knowledge that free drugs and medical devices would end up in the hands of a Shiite militia. That militia would then sell the drugs and devices to the black market to fund its operations against the U.S., the New York Times reported. Named in the lawsuit are U.S. firms General Electric, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer and European drugmakers AstraZeneca and Roche

Holding A.G. Fox News

Early numbers show the Army’s new fitness test is reducing injuries in basic training

18 October - In the 10 months since the Army implemented an occupational fitness test for potential recruits, injury and drop-out rates are down at basic training, officials said. The Occupational Physical Assessment Test has four events, and a soldier’s score determines which jobs he or she is qualified for. The idea behind it is that if soldiers are tested and categorized based on their Army-related physical abilities before basic training, they are less at risk of getting hurt once they’ve enlisted. ... Since the beginning of this year, injuries in basic combat training have dropped by 17 percent, while injuries in one station unit training — a combination of basic and advanced individual training done by infantry, armor, military police and other specialties — saw a 10 percent drop. On-time graduation rates are also up, statistics found. In basic training, they jumped from about 85 percent to about 93 percent
APHC Vector-borne Disease Report

The latest Vector-borne Disease Report includes information on West Nile virus, mosquito and tick-borne disease surveillance, and Lyme disease.

Nationally, CDC reports 1,175 human WNV cases in 2017. No confirmed or probable WNV cases have been reported in Army Active Duty (AD) Service Members and beneficiaries in 2017.

APHC U.S. Army Public Health Center

How the U.S. Army redesigned its mental health system

16 October - Leaders in today’s complex health care systems need better processes and systems for aligning day-to-day, clinical-care activities with the strategic goals of their organizations. The U.S. Army has accrued valuable experience in this area over the last decade through the design and implementation of its behavioral health system of care, its term for all of the mental health and substance-use clinical care it provides. Accounting systems now uniformly capture administrative data across a huge, geographically dispersed system. Workload standards allow clinicians the time to engage with the key people who affect recovery, such as commanders and family members. And self-reported patient data is combined with other nonclinical measures to produce a more accurate assessment of quality. Harvard Business Review

Military women, too, should serve unmolested

18 October - … In the United States, sexual assault is reported to be declining (dropping 58 percent between 1995 and 2010). But in the military it’s increasing enormously, so much so that the United Nations has gotten involved and the Pentagon reported that the military received a record number of sexual assault reports in 2016. … [Michael Kimmel,] a professor of sociology at Stony Brook University, told me, “[T]he military is different because of transparent hierarchy. “If the top of the military wanted this to stop, it would stop. Period.” … Senator [Kirsten] Gillibrand [has repeatedly] introduced legislation to remove the chain of command from handling these cases. … In 2016, she tried to reintroduce the bill, but the Republican leadership would not allow the bill onto the floor because the Department of Defense said taking away commanders’ authority would “undermine good order and discipline.” The New York Times


September 2017 - This report summarizes incidence rates of the five most commonly diagnosed sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among active component service members of the U.S. Armed Forces during 2007–2016. Chlamydia diagnoses were the most common, followed in decreasing order of frequency by diagnoses associated with genital human papillomavirus (HPV), gonorrhea, herpes simplex virus (HSV), and syphilis. Compared to men, women had higher rates of all STIs except for syphilis. In general, compared to their respective counterparts, younger service members, non-Hispanic blacks, soldiers, and enlisted members had higher incidence rates of STIs. Rates of STIs among men were stable throughout the surveillance period except for rates of syphilis, which increased. Among women, the incidence rates for HSV, syphilis, and chlamydia were stable, but the rates of HPV and gonorrhea decreased considerably. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report
Social support critical for military mental health

October 2017 - The Marine Resiliency Study-II examined changes in symptomatology across a deployment cycle to Afghanistan. ... The study team was looking at changes across the deployment cycle with deployment (low-trauma, high-trauma and nondeployed) and social support (low vs. high) as the grouping variables. Results indicated that insomnia increased post-deployment regardless of deployment trauma. ... Only the high-trauma group showed increased post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and nonperspective-taking, however, for a standard effect of 0.40 and 0.30, respectively. At the same time, the researchers reported that the low-trauma group showed decreased anxiety symptoms after deployment—standard effect 0.17). Study authors suggested the associations also depend on social support, with standard effects ranging from −0.22 to 0.51. U.S. Medicine

top of page...

GLOBAL

Amid fear and guns, polio finds a refuge

16 October - ... Poliovirus is so cunning, so contagious, so devastating, that a single case of Poliomyelitis, the paralysis-inducing disease it causes, sends up the flares as a public health emergency, which quickly ignites international concern. The disease occurs in only about one in every 200 cases of infection, so for every sick child — and infants and children are the most vulnerable — odds are there that hundreds more unwittingly carrying and spreading the pathogen. By last summer, it had been almost three years since the last polio case in Kano state, and for a moment it seemed it might go down in history as the last in all of Nigeria. It wasn’t to be. ... [I]t is in the badlands of Boko Haram, the Islamist extremists of northern Nigeria, along with stretches of the Pakistan and Afghanistan border controlled by the Taliban, where the planet’s last nurseries of wild poliovirus are found: no-go zones where terrorists actively stop vaccine from reaching babies and children. ... All of the most recent victims were children who had been huddling with their families in crowded, unsanitary camps where they had fled to escape the violent jihadists. Undark

Firefighters exposed to carcinogens through the skin

18 October - Firefighters face many known hazards on the job, but one area that hasn’t been well researched is how their skin’s exposure to hazardous chemicals might increase their risk of cancer. ... [R]esearchers at the University of Ottawa examined firefighters’ exposure to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in smoke from fires. PAHs can cause genetic mutations and are known carcinogens. They are one of the hazardous substances released into the air when wood, plastics, furniture, electronics or building materials burn. The researchers collected urine samples from -- and also wiped the skin and clothing of --
Updated
Contraception
Application
and eBook

CDC recently released “Update to CDC’s U.S. Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use, 2016: Revised Recommendations for the Use of Hormonal Contraception Among Women at High Risk for HIV Infection.”

Because of the update, CDC has released a new application for the U.S. Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use:
- Update your Android app at the Google Play store
- Update your Apple app at the iTunes store
The U.S. Selected Practice Recommendations for Contraceptive Use have also been updated. Download the updated eBook.

Global antibiotic resistance tracking project launched

13 October - Global charitable foundation Wellcome Trust today announced a new research project to track and document the burden of disease associated with antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The Global Burden of Disease AMR project will be collecting data from all over the world to create a map of disease and deaths caused by drug-resistant infections, according to a news release from UK-based Wellcome, which announced that it will be investing £2.4 million ($3.2 million US) in the project as part of its efforts to address the AMR threat. The UK government and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are providing additional funding. CIDRAP

Heading off the post-antibiotic age

18 October - Worldwide deaths from antibiotic-resistant bugs could rise more than tenfold by 2050 if steps aren’t taken to head off their spread, according to Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Fauci, who has warned of the danger of a “post-antibiotic age,” traced the spread of antibiotic resistance to rampant overprescribing, to the widespread use of the drugs to promote livestock growth, and to the relative trickle of new drugs being developed as possible replacements. Fauci ... said the slow pace of drug development is largely due to poor economic incentives. Antibiotics tend to be inexpensive and taken by patients for a relatively short time, so there is less demand for them than for drugs for chronic conditions. Harvard Gazette

How a healthy economy can shorten life spans

16 October - The health of a nation’s economy and the health of its people are connected, but in some surprising ways. At times like these, when the economy is strong and unemployment is low, research has found that death rates rise. At least, in the short term. In the long term, economic growth is good for health. ... One study of European countries just before and during the Great Recession found that a one-percentage-point increase in the unemployment rate is associated with a 0.5 percent decline in the overall mortality rate. Other studies of Europe during different periods, as well as those of the United States, found a similar relationship between joblessness and mortality. This is counterintuitive, since economic growth is a major factor in higher living standards. ... But a surging economy does more than generate greater income. An industrial economy also pumps out more air pollution as more goods are produced. Polluted air, it turns out, is a major contributor to the mortality-increasing effect of an economic boom. In their analysis of how economic growth increases mortality, David Cutler and Wei Huang, of Harvard University, and Adriana Lleras-Muney, of U.C.L.A., found that two-thirds of the effect can be attributed to air pollution alone. The New York Times
Motorbikes, trust and pepper soup: Ebola tips to tackle deadly diseases

19 October - Unsung local heroes who helped defeat the Ebola outbreak in West Africa may hold the key to thwarting deadly epidemics in the future, experts say. Alongside targeted assistance from abroad, local know-how is also vital in dealing with endemic killer diseases such as malaria, a recent conference in Sweden heard. ... Trust was a major factor in eventually ending the Ebola outbreak – but it wasn’t easy to establish, said [Anders] Nordström. “I think we all got it wrong in some way at the beginning - there were a lot of top-down messages, social mobilization, radio communications, big pamphlets etc. It didn’t work - people did not listen because we were not listening to them,” he said. Lack of trust led to a reluctance to declare who had been in contact with an infected person, preventing other cases from being found. “So we worked through local leaders, chiefs, mama queens, youth groups and civil society and NGOs,” he said. "It wasn’t enough to send an epidemiologist there – you needed to have access, and you needed to establish this relationship.” Reuters

Should donor sex influence blood transfusion practices?

17 October - Sick or injured men who receive blood transfusions may be more likely to die if their donor was a woman who has been pregnant in the past, a new study suggests. The reasons are unclear, and the study wasn’t focused on explaining them, but [researchers say] that it’s possible antibodies women develop during pregnancy to protect their growing baby might later trigger dangerous reactions in some male recipients of blood from previously pregnant donors. ... Women didn’t appear to have an increased risk of death when they received blood from a previously pregnant female donor, however. Reuters

top of page...

INFLUENZA

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

During week 40 (October 1-7, 2017), influenza activity was low in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 40 was influenza A. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories is low.
- 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.

CDC
ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 40/2017 (2 – 9 October 2017)

- This is the first weekly report for the 2017-2018 influenza season.
- Low influenza activity was reported by all 36 reporting countries.
- Influenza viruses were detected sporadically both in sentinel and non-sentinel specimens, including hospitalised patients, with both influenza A and B type viruses being detected.
- For week 40/2017, data from the 20 countries or regions reporting to the EuroMOMO project indicated all-cause mortality at expected levels for this time of the year. European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

Flu trends in VA system correspond to national trends

17 October - A new study that analyzed flu trends in the Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital systems from 2011 to 2016 and compared those data to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) FluView data found high levels of correlation between rates of hospitalization and positive tests. ... For 13,690 influenza-coded VA hospitalizations, the median patient age was 67 years, 12,914 (94%) were male, and the median stay was 4 days, with 2,148 (16%) involving intensive care and 406 deaths (3%). These number track national trends presented in CDC’s FluView. The authors said their data can help both VA and CDC decision-makers who must estimate the annual burden of influenza. 
CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

12 October - Febrile respiratory illness cases:
- Military Recruits - 87 positive of 138 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 12 positive of 18 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 17 positive of 43 tested.
- Elevated FRI rate at MCRD San Diego due to influenza A/H3, with 8 confirmed cases in unvaccinated recruits during past 2 weeks. Naval Health Research Center

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

- During 1 - 7 October 2017 (Surveillance Week 40), a total of 64 specimens were collected and received from 27 locations. Results were finalized for 62 specimens from 27 locations. There was one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 identified at Eglin AFB, FL. ...
- A recent report by Europe's I-MOVE + (Integrated Monitoring of Vaccines in Europe plus) hospital network, demonstrates low vaccine effectiveness (VE) for elderly patients hospitalized with influenza A(H3N2) during the 2016-2017 season. VE for
hospitalization with A(H3N2) was 17% for person’s ≥ 65 years and 10% for those ≥80 years. The 2017-2018 season could potentially see low VE again for influenza A(H3N2) strains as that component did not change from last season.

U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

WHO: Influenza Update

16 October - Influenza activity remained at low levels in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere. Declining levels of influenza activity were reported in the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere and in some countries of South and South East Asia. In Central America and the Caribbean, low influenza activity was reported in a few countries. Worldwide, influenza A(H3N2) and B viruses accounted for the majority of influenza detections. WHO

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Autopsy ordered amidst large outbreak in Louisiana

19 October - Louisiana officials are investigating a suspected foodborne illness outbreak in Caldwell Parish that has sickened hundreds, possibly killing one, according to local media reports Wednesday night. Neither the Louisiana Department of Health nor the parish websites had information about the investigation, but Parish Sheriff Clay Bennett told the Monroe News-Star newspaper’s Ashley Mott that he and at least 100 other people are sick. He said reports started coming in Monday night in the Northeast Louisiana parish, which is on Interstate 20. Food Safety News

Five military dogs receive Medal of Courage

13 October - Marines awarded medals to five retired military dogs — four Labrador retrievers and a German shepherd — for serving “with distinction” in Afghanistan and Iraq. At the Wednesday evening ceremony in the Rayburn House office building on Capitol Hill, Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Brian Beaudreault, retired Marine Corps Col. Scott Campbell and former Cpl. Jeff De Young announced the recipients of the American Humane Lois Pope K-9 Medal of Courage as American Humane President Robin Ganzert placed the medals around the necks of Alphie, Capa, Coffee and Ranger. Beaudreault commended the recipients for their courage, saying, each dog “has served their units, their handlers and their country with distinction.” Military Times
McDonald's South Korea office raided in burger probe: reports

18 October - South Korean investigators raided the Seoul office of McDonald’s Corp on Wednesday following a series of complaints that children fell ill after eating hamburger patties alleged to have been undercooked, Yonhap News Agency and other media said. The Seoul central district prosecutors’ office confiscated some documents and evidence at the office and three other companies, including an ingredient supplier, the reports said. ... In July, a consumer filed a complaint against the U.S. firm, saying her 4-year-old daughter was diagnosed with hemolytic uremic syndrome, often referred to as hamburger disease, after suffering irreversible kidney damage following the consumption of a McDonald’s hamburger last year, Yonhap said. Complaints also were filed by parents of four more children who became sick after eating McDonald’s burgers. ... The chain temporarily halted sales of the burgers, launched in 1997, to determine the cause. Reuters

Twentynine Palms commissary closed indefinitely for rodent problem

13 October - The installation commander at Twentynine Palms, California, has ordered the commissary closed until further notice after Army veterinarians found evidence of a "significant" rodent problem. The produce department and the bakery/deli area were closed Wednesday after evidence of rodents was found in those areas of the commissary, located at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms. The entire store was shuttered Wednesday night. Military Times

top of page...

WELLNESS

Fatty liver disease fastest-growing reason for transplants in young U.S. adults

17 October - Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease and its more aggressive form, nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, have become the fastest-growing reasons for liver transplants in young Americans, according to a recent study. Typically, older adults experience the slow progression of fatty liver disease that is not related to alcohol but can lead ultimately to liver cirrhosis. Due to increasing childhood obesity, hypertension and diabetes, however, more young adults are reaching end-stage liver disease early in life, researchers say. ... "In Texas in particular, nonalcoholic steatohepatitis is the No. 1 indicator for transplants in adults," [Dr. Naim Alkhouri] told Reuters Health in a phone interview. "It now affects 1 in 3 adults and 1 in 10 children." Reuters
More men than women infected with oral human papillomavirus

16 October - Roughly one in nine U.S. men have oral infections of the cancer-causing human papillomavirus (HPV), more than triple the infection rate for women, a new study suggests. HPV is among the most common sexually transmitted diseases. ... Among U.S. adults ages 18 to 69, approximately 11 million men and 3.2 million women nationwide have oral HPV infections, researchers estimated. Men were at the highest risk of developing oral HPV when they had oral sex with other men or also had genital HPV infections. Rising rates of HPV infections among men may help explain why throat cancers in men are now more common than cervical cancer in women, said senior study author Ashish Deshmukh, a public health researcher at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Reuters

Scientists zero in on a new target for obesity

18 October - For the 35 million American adults who are battling obesity, the age-old advice to "improve diet and exercise" often falls short. And surgical interventions that reduce stomach size—although effective—can prove risky. But there may be another alternative: flooding the body with a protein that makes an individual prefer low-fat food and feel full longer, and that activates neurons responsible for regulating the body's energy intake. Such a simple fix may sound too good to be true, but the approach has shown promise in experiments with mice, rats and monkeys. If the therapy can be improved and shown to work well in humans, it could be an entirely new way to help battle obesity, diabetes and related conditions. Scientific American

Sleep scientist warns against walking through life 'in an underslept state'

16 October - The National Sleep Foundation recommends an average of eight hours of sleep per night for adults, but sleep scientist Matthew Walker says that too many people are falling short of the mark. "Human beings are the only species that deliberately deprive themselves of sleep for no apparent gain," Walker says. "Many people walk through their lives in an underslept state, not realizing it." Walker is the director of the Center for Human Sleep Science at the University of California, Berkeley. He points out that lack of sleep — defined as six hours or fewer — can have serious consequences. Sleep deficiency is associated with problems in concentration, memory and the immune system, and may even shorten life span. "Every disease that is killing us in developed nations has causal and significant links to a lack of sleep," he says. NPR
**U.S. indicts major Chinese traffickers for selling fentanyl online**

17 October - The U.S. Department of Justice has indicted two major Chinese drug traffickers on charges of making illegal versions of fentanyl and selling the highly addictive drug to Americans over the internet and through international mail. Xiaobing Yan, 40, and Jian Zhang, 38, who are both in China and have not been taken into U.S. custody, were charged with conspiring to distribute large quantities of fentanyl and fentanyl analogues into the United States, the Justice Department said. They were charged in separate indictments unsealed on Monday in Mississippi and North Dakota. ... The United States does not have an extradition agreement with China. Reuters

**USAFRICOM**

**Madagascar: Plague total grows in Madagascar as response builds**

13 October - The World Health Organization (WHO) said today in an update on Madagascar’s plague outbreak that the number of infections as of yesterday has climbed to 684, an increase of 297 cases since its last update on Oct 9. ... Of Madagascar’s new cases, 197 are pneumonic, putting that total at 474. Twelve more deaths have been reported, lifting that number to 57. The WHO said the latest totals reflect an overall reduction in the case-fatality rate, which over the past few days has dropped from 11.6% to 8.3%. CIDRAP

**Nigeria: Three cases of monkeypox confirmed in Nigeria**

16 October - The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) confirmed three cases of monkeypox today among dozens of suspected cases. The samples were sent to Dakar, Senegal, for laboratory analysis at the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Laboratory last week, and the positive results shed new light on what could be one of the largest monkeypox outbreaks in Africa. However, a global health expert who has worked on vaccination campaigns and investigated outbreaks in Africa over the past decades said some of the features of the current outbreak don’t fit the typical pattern and that local health officials face complex challenges in protecting people against the disease. CIDRAP

**Seychelles: Plague ruled out in Seychelles but islands on guard**

18 October - Plague has been ruled out in the Seychelles following lab results from 10 patients, including one earlier deemed a “probable” case, the World Health Organization
WHO said on Wednesday as the disease continued to spread in Madagascar. The U.N. health body initially raised the alarm on Monday after initial tests on a 34-year-old man who had arrived from Madagascar. ... But all 10 samples have now tested negative for plague at the Institut Pasteur in Paris, the WHO said in a statement. Reuters

Uganda: Uganda confirms one death from Ebola-like Marburg virus

19 October - Uganda has confirmed one death from Marburg virus, a highly infectious hemorrhagic fever similar to Ebola, the health minister said on Thursday. ... The victim, a 50-year old woman, died on October 11 at a hospital in eastern Uganda after "she presented with signs and symptoms suggestive of viral hemorrhagic fevers", the minister said. The woman had nursed her 42-year old brother who died on September 25 with similar signs and symptoms and also participated in cultural preparation of the body for burial, she added. Aceng said the man was “a hunter who carried out his activities where there are caves with heavy presence of bats,” Aceng said. The African fruit bat is the reservoir host of the Marburg virus although infected bats do not show obvious signs of the disease. Reuters

USCENTCOM

Saudi Arabia identifies new MERS cases linked to camels

16 October - The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health (MOH) reported two new cases of MERS-CoV over the last few days, both linked to camel exposure. On Oct 13, a 60-year-old Saudi man from Jazan was diagnosed as having MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) after presenting with symptoms. He is in stable condition, and the MOH said the man had direct contact with camels. Yesterday the MOH said a 25-year-old male expatriate in Riyadh also had MERS. He is in stable condition and also had direct contact with camels. Neither patient is a healthcare worker. Saudi Arabia's MERS-CoV case count since 2012 has now reached 1,731, including 701 deaths. Four patients are still being treated, according to the MOH. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

Syria: WHO says attack on Syria vaccine store leaves children at risk

13 October - The World Health Organization said on Friday it had received reports of an attack on medical facilities in eastern Syria that had destroyed a store containing more than 130,000 vaccine doses against measles and polio. If confirmed, the WHO said, the attack would put thousands of children at risk of these serious infectious, viral diseases. Both can spread rapidly in areas of conflict. ... The WHO said the reports it received were of an attack
on a vaccine cold room at health facilities in al-Mayadin, near Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria.

Reuters

Yemen: How Yemen’s cholera outbreak became the fastest growing in modern history

18 October - ... At last count on October 11, the World Health Organization reported that there have been more than 822,000 suspected cases of cholera and 2,160 cholera-related deaths since the end of April, when the outbreak emerged. ... Yemen’s outbreak has already surpassed the epidemic in Haiti. ... [T]he outbreak was entirely man-made — the result of the violence that erupted in 2014 when the Houthis, a rebel group from the north of Yemen, seized the capital of Sanaa. Months later, a coalition led by the region’s wealthiest nation, Saudi Arabia, began bombing Yemen. ... [A]fter the Saudi-led bombing campaign began, the government stopped paying civil servants. Sanitation workers went on strike in response to unpaid wages, leading to garbage pile-ups on the streets and septic backups. When the rains came, water washed through the garbage, bringing dangerous bacteria into the water supply. At the same time, the bombing devastated the country’s already fragile health system. Today, more than 55 percent of all Yemeni health facilities are closed or only partially functional. Frontline

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USEUCOM

Europe: ‘This is very alarming!’ Flying insects vanish from nature preserves

18 October - Not long ago, a lengthy drive on a hot day wouldn’t be complete without scraping bug guts off a windshield. But splattered insects have gone the way of the Chevy Nova — you just don’t see them on the road like you used to. Biologists call this the windshield phenomenon. It’s a symptom, they say, of a vanishing population. ... “The windscreen phenomenon is probably one of the best illustrative ways to realize we are dealing with a decline in flying insects,” said Caspar Hallmann, an ecologist at Radboud University in the Netherlands. Hallmann is part of a research team that recently waded through 27 years’ worth of insects collected in German nature preserves. Between 1989 and 2016, according to a report published Wednesday in the journal PLOS One, the biomass of flying insects captured in these regions decreased by a seasonal average of 76 percent ... Insects were collected at 63 locations in Germany, including grasslands, swamps, sand dunes, wastelands, shrub land and along the margins of human settlement. All of the locations were protected areas. The Washington Post
Ireland: Ireland reckons with damage from its deadliest storm for decades

17 October - Ireland dived into a cleanup effort on Tuesday after one of the most powerful storms ever recorded in the northeastern Atlantic tore across the island, killing at least three people and leaving a trail of destruction. Officials said hundreds of thousands of people in the country remained without power on Tuesday, after the remnants of Hurricane Ophelia tore roofs off buildings in Ireland’s largest cities, Dublin and Cork, and pushed ocean water over sea walls on its west coast. The national utility the Electricity Supply Board warned that it could take up to 10 days to restore power to all 245,000 homes and businesses that were without electricity, which represented 12 percent of the network. Electrical outages also meant that some water treatment plants could no longer operate. The New York Times

Ukraine: Ukraine passes long-delayed health reforms praised by West

19 October - Ukrainian lawmakers voted through a long-delayed overhaul of the health system on Thursday that the state’s Western backers say will raise standards and tackle a culture of bribe-taking in surgeries and hospitals. The European Union and the International Monetary Fund have been pressing for faster reform is a country where lives are more than five years shorter than the European average, according to the World Health Organization. But opponents of the changes, including many opposition MPs, say the more Western-style system will force patients to pay for their medicines for the first time, leaving the poorest with no healthcare. The legislation lets patients choose their own doctor, rather than have one foisted on them - a move the government said would encourage medics to improve service and give them less opportunity to demand kickbacks for treatment. Reuters

U.S.: Backyard chicken trend causes spike in infections, 1 fatal

19 October - The popular trend of raising backyard chickens in U.S. cities and suburbs is bringing with it a soaring number of illnesses from poultry-related diseases, some of them fatal. Since January, more than 1,100 people have contracted Salmonella poisoning from chickens and ducks in 48 states, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Almost 250 were hospitalized and one person died. The toll was four times higher than in 2015. The CDC estimates the actual number of cases from contact with chickens and ducks is likely much higher. "For one salmonella case we know of in an outbreak, there are up to 30 others
that we don’t know about,” CDC veterinarian Megin Nichols said. A "large contributing factor" to the surge, Nichols said, comes from natural food fanciers who have taken up the backyard chicken hobby but don’t understand the potential dangers. STAT

U.S.: California declares hepatitis A outbreak an emergency

16 October - Governor of California Edmund G. (Jerry) Brown, Jr., on Oct 13 declared the state’s ongoing hepatitis A outbreak an emergency, which will allow the state to buy hepatitis A vaccine directly from manufacturers. This is the largest outbreak in the United States in the 22 years since the hepatitis A vaccine has been available, and the current federal supply of the vaccine is not sufficient to meet California’s needs, the governor said in his proclamation. As of Oct 6, the outbreak total is 576 cases, including 18 deaths. Most of the cases have occurred in homeless people and illicit drug users. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

U.S.: Cleanup from California fires poses environmental and health risks

16 October - ... California’s fires are far from out. They have killed at least 41 people and burned about 5,700 structures and over 213,000 acres since they exploded in force on Oct. 8 and 9 — record totals for a state that is used to wildfires. Thousands of firefighters are still at work fighting blazes and tens of thousands of people remain under mandatory evacuation from their homes, though fire officials have expressed cautious optimism about bringing the fires into containment. But ... the process of cleaning it all up, which has not even begun, is very likely to bring its own thorny set of issues, in the costs, timetables and liability questions — all compounded by scale, in the thousands of properties that must be repaired and restored. ... Dr. Alan Lockwood, a retired neurologist who has written widely about public health ... said an apt comparison might be the environmental cleanup after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, in New York, as debris and dust swirled through Lower Manhattan. The New York Times

U.S.: Drug companies make eyedrops too big, and you pay for the waste

18 October - If you've ever put in eyedrops, some of them have almost certainly spilled onto your eyelid or cheek. The good news is the mess doesn't necessarily mean you missed. The bad news is that medicine you wiped off your face is wasted by design — and it’s well-known to the drug companies that make the drops. Eyedrops overflow our eyes because drug companies make the typical drop — from glaucoma drugs that cost hundreds of dollars to cheap over-the-counter bottles — larger than a human eye can hold. ... [Dr. Alan Robin] has urged drug companies to move to smaller drops — to no avail. "They had no
interest in people, their pocketbooks or what the cost of drugs meant.” NPR

U.S.: EPA says higher radiation levels pose ‘no harmful health effect’

16 October - In the event of a dirty bomb or a nuclear meltdown, emergency responders can safely tolerate radiation levels equivalent to thousands of chest X-rays, the Environmental Protection Agency said in new guidelines that ease off on established safety levels. The EPA’s determination sets a level ten times the drinking water standard for radiation recommended under President Barack Obama. It could lead to the administration of President Donald Trump weakening radiation safety levels, watchdog groups critical of the move say. ... The change was included as part of EPA "guidance" on messaging and communications in the event of a nuclear power plant meltdown or dirty bomb attack. The FAQ document, dated September 2017, is part of a broader planning document for nuclear emergencies, and does not carry the weight of federal standards or law.
Bloomberg Technology

U.S.: Insurance a major factor in blacks’ higher breast cancer mortality

19 October - African-American women have worse breast cancer survival than white women in the U.S., and a new study suggests that is largely because black women are less likely to have health insurance. About 23 percent of black women diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004-2013 had either no health insurance or had Medicaid coverage, versus 8 percent of white breast cancer patients. ... That insurance difference explained about 37 percent of the excess mortality among black women, the researchers calculated. The next most important factor was actual differences in the tumors, which accounted for 23 percent of the mortality disparity. Reuters

U.S.: New NIOSH center to study safety and health implications of occupational robots

16 October - Increasing numbers of robots are entering the 21st century workplace, yet the benefits and potential risks of robots in the workplace aren’t fully known. To address the knowledge gap related to robotics and worker safety and health, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) announces the launch of the Center for Occupational Robotics Research. The new Center will assess potential benefits and risks of robot workers and develop guidance for safe interactions between human and robot. CDC

U.S.: Scott Pruitt suggests he will restrict scientists who get EPA grants from advising the agency

17 October - Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt hinted Tuesday at plans to rid the agency’s scientific advisory boards of researchers who get EPA grants, arguing that the current structure raises questions about their independence. “What's most
important at the agency is to have scientific advisers that are objective, independent-minded, providing transparent recommendations,” Pruitt told an audience at the conservative Heritage Foundation. “If we have individuals who are on those boards, sometimes receiving money from the agency ... that to me causes questions on the independence and the veracity and the transparency of those recommendations that are coming our way.” Pruitt promised to “fix that” in a directive he plans to issue next week. It remained unclear Tuesday what such a directive would say. The EPA declined further comment. The Washington Post

U.S.: Trump's drug czar nominee out after "60 Minutes" opioid report

17 October - President Trump announced Tuesday that his nominee for drug czar, Rep. Tom Marino, has withdrawn his name from consideration for the position. ... The announcement came following a joint investigation by CBS' "60 Minutes" and The Washington Post on the opioid crisis. The report found that Congress helped disarm the Drug Enforcement Administration during the height of the crisis. Marino, R-Pennsylvania, was the chief advocate for the bill at the center of the investigation. The bill weakened the DEA's control over opioid drug distributors. MSN

HURRICANE AFTERMATH

U.S.: Desperate Puerto Ricans line up for water — at a hazardous-waste site

16 October - Every 10 minutes or so, a truck or a van pulled up to the exposed spigot of an overgrown well, known as Maguayo #4, that sits not far from a bustling expressway and around the corner from a Krispy Kreme doughnut shop. Fencing around the area had been torn open, and a red and white “Peligro” sign, warning of danger, lay hidden beneath debris and dense vegetation. One after another, people attached a hose to draw water for bathing, washing dishes and, in some cases, drinking. They filled buckets, jugs, soda bottles. What many didn’t realize is that the well is one of nearly a dozen that are part of the Dorado Groundwater Contamination Superfund site — designated last year by the Environmental Protection Agency as among the nation’s most toxic sites. Past testing here has shown the presence of tetrachloroethylene and trichloroethylene, solvents commonly used in industrial processes, which can cause health problems including liver damage and increased risk of cancer. The Washington Post

U.S.: Solar industry wants to build Puerto Rico's grid of the future

16 October - ... The solar industry has taken particular interest in San Juan in the aftermath
of the hurricane. It’s primarily a humanitarian effort for these companies, but it’s also a chance to showcase an energy source capable of enduring natural disasters. Tesla Inc. is sending its Powerwall battery systems and Sunrun has sent more than 12,000 pounds of solar products and equipment to the island. The Solar Energy Industries Association has received pledges for more than $1.2 million in product and monetary contributions from its network. A week and a half after Birt’s initial outreach, a plane arrived in San Juan carrying enough solar panels and batteries to install 18.4 kilowatts worth of systems. The installations in Barrio Obrero were completed two days later. **Bloomberg**

**U.S.: State health officials extend Harvey food assistance program**

16 October - State health department officials will give Harris County [Texas] residents who need food assistance after Hurricane Harvey three more days to register, but advocacy groups still want more time and more convenient locations. ... Advocacy groups had previously called on state lawmakers and HHS to extend the program for at least two weeks, citing the experiences of many residents who said they waited for in line for hours at various registration sites in Harris County only to be turned away. **Houston Chronicle**

**U.S.: There's a hospital ship waiting for sick Puerto Ricans -- but no one knows how to get on it**

17 October - ... Clinics that are overwhelmed with patients and staff say they don’t even know how to begin sending cases to the ship. Doctors say there’s a rumor that patients have to be admitted to a central hospital before they can be transferred to the Comfort. Only 33 of the 250 beds on the Comfort -- 13% -- are being used, nearly two weeks after the ship arrived. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the official protocol is for patients in need to go to their nearest medical facility. If that facility is unable to provide care, a doctor there should contact the medical coordinating center in San Juan. ... "Only patients with critical needs requiring specialized care will be transferred to USNS Comfort," said Coast Guard Lt. David Connor in an email. He is working at the FEMA Joint Information Center in San Juan. **CNN**

**U.S.: The storm has passed, but Puerto Rico’s health faces prolonged recovery**

16 October - ... [T]he challenges wrought by Hurricane Maria to the health of Puerto Ricans and the island’s fragile health system are in many ways just beginning. Three weeks after that direct hit, nearly four dozen deaths are associated with the storm. But the true toll on Puerto Rico’s 3.4 million residents is likely to involve sickness and loss of life that will only become apparent in the coming months and in indirect ways. As victims continue to be found and stranded people reached, it will take time to assess the consequences of their missed care or undertreatment. ... Puerto Rico has a higher rate of diabetes than any state, according to 2015 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About half of
the island’s population depends on Medicaid. And, unlike in the U.S., Puerto Rico’s Medicaid system receives a fixed amount to meet residents’ needs, a pot of money that could run dry next month, said Jenniffer González-Colón, Puerto Rico’s delegate to Congress. ... Coordinated efforts to deliver fuel, water, and medications to health facilities have allowed some to reopen. As of Oct. 12, federal emergency officials said nearly all Puerto Rican hospitals were open, although some are still dependent on generators. The Puerto Rican government said electricity has been restored to more than half of the hospitals. ... Cases of diarrhea, pink eye, and skin rashes are appearing in larger numbers ... and health officials are concerned about infections from contaminated water. STAT

U.S.: U.S. Virgin Islands - Leptospirosis case confirmed on St. Thomas

17 October - The U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) Department of Health is reporting a confirmed case of leptospirosis in the territory on St. Thomas, according to Health Commissioner Dr. Michelle S. Davis Friday. Dr. Davis said D.O.H.’s team of epidemiologists would investigate where the victim lives to determine how the disease was contracted. Like the cases reported in Puerto Rico, this case was contracted following Hurricane Maria. Outbreak News Today

top of page...

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Asia: Studies show rise in drug-resistant TB in India, China

18 October - A systematic review and meta-analysis of previously published studies reveals a significant rise in drug-resistant pulmonary tuberculosis (DR-TB) prevalence in India over the past two decades, researchers reported yesterday in BMC Infectious Diseases. Another study in China, meanwhile, revealed an increase in DR-TB among children. The Indian study was designed to provide pooled estimates for DR-TB ... across two study periods (decade 1: 1995-2005; decade 2: 2006-2015). ...[C]omparative analysis showed that DR-TB prevalence rose from 37.7% in decade 1 to 46.1% in decade 2. The overall prevalence estimated for the 20-year study period was 42.6%. ... In the second study ... a team of Chinese investigators examined the rise in DR-TB among children in Shandong province on the east coast. The retrospective study of 2006 to 2015 data from 36 TB prevention and control centers showed that 784 of 14,232 new TB cases (5.5%) were among children. Among the children with TB, 18.9% had DR-TB and 6.9% had MDR-TB. Over the 10-year study period, the proportion of children with DR-TB ... from 14.7% in 2006 to 27.5% in 2015, while MDR-TB increased from 1.3% to 15.4%. CIDRAP
India: Fear of toxic smog leads India to limit Diwali fireworks

17 October - India is set to celebrate Diwali this week, but the Indian capital could be in for a different sort of celebration. Once illuminated with clay lamps, the festival of lights has morphed into a festival of sound and fury. It's estimated some 50,000 tons of fireworks are exploded during Diwali, which marks the homecoming of the Hindu god Lord Ram from exile. But a public health alarm was sounded in Delhi after Diwali last year, when a toxic haze blanketed the city for days. Delhi's air quality is extremely poor: A 2015 study found that half of the city's 4.4 million schoolchildren have diminished lung capacity. To control the escalating pollution, the Supreme Court banned the sale of fireworks during this year's Diwali. (The use of fireworks, though, was not banned.) The ban on sales extends until Nov. 1 to allow the court to fully monitor its impact in the wake of the festival. NPR

Vietnam: Vietnam on flood alert again

16 October - Just a week after destructive floods battered Vietnam, the country is now preparing for the arrival of Tropical Storm Khanun. ... Vietnam's disaster prevention agency said 72 people died in last week's floods. According to the government and state-run Vietnam Television, those floods were the worst in decades. Thousands of homes were submerged. Another 200 houses collapsed, and several towns remain cut off by the floodwaters. The floods also damaged more than 22,000 hectares of rice fields. The torrential rains associated with Tropical Storm Khanun will exacerbate those floods, with the country braced for another spell of widespread disruption across the north over the next few days. Al Jazeera

top of page...

Dominica: Exodus from hurricane-hit Dominica as recovery remains elusive

18 October - One fifth of the entire population of Dominica has left the island in the month since Hurricane Maria, IRIN has learned. The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency gave IRIN an informal estimate of the exodus: 15,000 to 20,000 people of the total 73,000 living on the island. A ferry operator reported 300 departures daily, but said most passengers bought a return ticket. Some however, faced with overwhelming loss and despair, plan never to return. ... [There has been] a wave of sweeping post-hurricane layoffs
as businesses countrywide shut up shop. ... Newtown, diarrhoea is spreading quickly; likely due to shortages in clean water forcing people to use the creeks for drinking and cooking.

IRIN

top of page...