NOTICE:
There will be no Army Public Health Weekly Update next week. Publication will resume on 5 January 2018.

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Deported veterans should not be denied the health care they’ve earned

19 September - Each year, around 8,000 noncitizens enlist in the military. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Defense estimated that more than 65,000 immigrants (noncitizens and naturalized citizens) were serving on active duty in the U.S. armed forces. That represented approximately 5 percent of all active-duty personnel. Enlisting in the military can expedite the process of becoming a citizen — but it doesn’t guarantee it. A conviction for something as minor as drug possession can result in automatic deportation. According to a report from the ACLU of California, thousands of foreign-born veterans are now scattered across the globe following deportation. ... And once deported, veterans can no longer access the VA health care system, depriving them of the VA benefits to which they are entitled. STAT

Incidence and burden of gynecologic disorders, active component service women, U.S. Armed Forces, 2012–2016

November 2017 - This report describes the incidence, burden, and co-occurrence of four common gynecologic disorders among active component service women during 2012–2016. Overall incidence rates were highest for menorrhagia (100.9 per 10,000 person-years [p-yrs]), followed by uterine fibroids (63.2 per 10,000 p-yrs), endometriosis (30.8 per 10,000 p-yrs), and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS, 25.3 per 10,000 p-yrs). Annual incidence rates and medical encounters for menorrhagia decreased by roughly 50% from 2012 through 2015, and then increased slightly in 2016. Annual incidence rates of PCOS decreased modestly between 2012 and 2016, whereas rates for endometriosis and uterine fibroids remained relatively stable. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

Major initiative seeks to combat U.S. soldiers’ weight problems and injuries

20 December - Vicenza has been selected as one of 10 innovation demonstration locations by Healthy Army Communities, a program that aims to design environments where people eat smarter and move more. (Other locations include Fort Meade in Maryland and Fort Belvoir in Virginia.) ... These base makeovers are setting the scene for the launch of Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F), a larger initiative — a decade in the making and still pending final approval — that strives to radically change how the Army prepares service members. The proposal includes the introduction of a new field manual for training, plus the creation of Soldier Performance Readiness Centers ... which will be state-of-the-art fitness facilities staffed by experts who can educate and offer real-time feedback on proper form,
Pentagon releases detailed policy for recruiting transgender troops, roiling legal fight over Trump’s ban

20 December - The Defense Department has issued detailed new policy guidance to military recruiters for how to enlist transgender men and women into the armed forces, intensifying an emotionally charged legal fight over whether the Pentagon is ready to implement such a sensitive cultural change. ... The memorandum states the Pentagon will comply with federal court orders, now under appeal, that direct the military to begin accepting transgender recruits Jan. 1. The court order also raises the possibility that a handful of individuals who graduated from U.S. service academies in the spring could now join the military. ... The policy paper was issued by the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command in Chicago, “and shall remain in effect until expressly revoked,” the memorandum said. It states that allowing transgender military service is “mandatory” and repeats a previous directive from Marine Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who has said all people will be “treated with dignity and respect.” The Washington Post

Reverberations of war complicate Vietnam veterans' end-of-life care

16 December - Ron Fleming is 74 now, but he's spent most of his life trying to recapture what life felt like when he was 21, fighting in Vietnam. ... Fleming has congestive heart failure and arthritis, and his asthma attacks often land him in the hospital. Ten years ago, he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, which makes him quick to anger and hyper-vigilant, as though he's still in that helicopter. Fleming's physical and mental health symptoms, combined with his military history, are a challenge to the VA's palliative care team, which is coordinating his care as his health deteriorates. It is a challenge they are facing more often as Vietnam veterans age and develop life-threatening illnesses. For some veterans, the stoicism they relied on in battle returns full-force in the hospital; they're less willing than other patients to admit they are afraid or in pain, and less willing to accept treatment. Other vets with PTSD are even more reluctant to take pain-relieving opioids because the drugs can actually make their symptoms worse, triggering frightening flashbacks. NPR

The bomb that went off twice

18 December - ... In 1941, American chemists ... worked with a team of government scientists to invent a new chemical process that made it possible to manufacture ... “super-explosives.” ... The Americans called the new formula RDX, and it transformed weapons overnight. ... RDX was packed into 10,000-pound underwater bombs dropped by British airplanes to blow up German river dams and disrupt the country's hydropower. ... It was even surreptitiously soaked into firewood that would later explode in the furnaces of German locomotives. ... For most of the last 74 years, a single industrial plant in rural Tennessee [Holston Army Ammunition Plant] served as America's RDX factory and it...
produced as much as 40 million pounds of white crystalline powder each month that fueled the vast carpet bombing of the Korean peninsula, and then later, America’s involvement in Vietnam. ... But RDX ... has had an unwanted second life — as an unusually persistent pollutant poisoning the American homeland. At bomb-making plants and ordnance testing ranges across the United States, RDX has spread into the soil and contaminated water supplies. ProPublica

The Pentagon’s claim that it needs to train 23,000 personnel to accept transgender recruits is 'suspicious,' former military surgeons general say

18 December - The Trump administration’s claim that it would struggle to train tens of thousands of personnel by Jan. 1 in order to process new transgender recruits, and the rush to do that could damage the military, is “suspicious,” according to a policy paper by three former top military medical officials. Preparing more than 23,000 military recruiters and medical evaluators for the recruiting ordered to begin in two weeks by federal courts would not be difficult or time-consuming, former surgeons general of the Navy and Army and a former Coast Guard director of health and safety wrote in the paper set to be published by the Palm Center rights group Monday. The Washington Examiner

GLOBAL

Adjusted BMI needed to unveil ethnic-based obesity differences

18 December - Body mass index (BMI) may not be a suitable measure of body fat for certain ethnicities, researchers suggested. In an analysis of English schoolchildren, young and adolescent South Asian children had a higher average adjusted BMI compared with age-matched white children, according to an ethnic-specific BMI-adjusted model. ... "High [body fatness] in South Asian and black children in England is of particular concern, because both ethnic groups have high risks of [type 2 diabetes] and [cardiovascular disease] in adulthood compared with white children; these risks have their origins in childhood," the authors noted. MedPage Today

Mapping brain lesions for clues to criminal behavior

19 December - Research examining brain lesions in individuals with a history of criminal behavior found a common link to a network involved in moral decision-making. ... “Our lab has developed a new technique for understanding neuropsychiatric symptoms based on focal brain lesions and a wiring diagram of the human brain,” said senior author Michael
Fox. ... [The researchers] mapped brain lesions in 17 patients who exhibited criminal behavior after — but not before — the lesions appeared. Analyses revealed that the lesions were located in diverse brain regions, but all mapped to a common network. "We found that this network was involved in moral decision-making in normal people, perhaps giving a reason for why brain lesions in these locations would make patients more likely to behave criminally," said [First author, Richard] Darby. The network is not involved with cognition control or empathy. Harvard Gazette

**Study finds long-term success for fecal transplant to treat *C difficile***

20 December - A study yesterday in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* reports high long-term success rates of fecal microbiota transplant (FMT) against recurrent *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI). Emory University researchers contacted all eligible patients who received FMT for recurrent CDI from Jul 1, 2012, to Dec 31, 2016. Of 190 eligible patients, 137 (72%) completed the telephone survey. The survey found that 113 of 137 patients (82%) had no *C difficile* recurrence after a median follow-up of 22 months. Almost all patients (122 of 128, or 95%) said they would undergo FMT again, and 70% of those 122 said they would prefer FMT to antibiotics as initial treatment if they were to have a CDI recurrence. CIDRAP Stewardship/Resistance Scan (first item)

**Worldwide trends in body-mass index, underweight, overweight, and obesity from 1975 to 2016**

16 December - From 1975 to 2016, children’s and adolescents' age-standardised mean BMI increased globally and in most regions. The global increase was 0·32 kg/m2 per decade (95% CrI 0·23–0·41, PP of the observed increase being a true increase>0·9999) for girls and 0·40 kg/m2 per decade (0·30–0·50, PP>0·9999) for boys, leading to virtually identical age-standardised mean BMIs of 18·6 kg/m2 (18·4–18·7) for girls and 18·5 kg/m2 (18·3–18·7) for boys in 2016. The corresponding figures for adults were 24·8 kg/m2 (24·6–25·0) in women and 24·5 kg/m2 (24·3–24·6) in men. ... Globally, the prevalence of moderate and severe underweight changed less than the rise in obesity, from 9·2% ... in 1975 to 8·4% ... in 2016 in girls and from 14·8% ... in 1975 to 12·4% ... in 2016 in boys. The relatively small change in moderate and severe underweight prevalence at the global level, however, was partly due to faster population growth in regions where underweight prevalence is higher ... while prevalence declined in most regions. The Lancet

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AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 49:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity increased during week 48, and ranged from minimal to high, depending on the state.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity increased to moderate in Italy, but remained minimal to low for the rest of EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in Guam and Japan, however Hawaii and the Republic of Korea had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Complete TMDS data for week 48 and 49 is currently not available. Therefore, the CENTCOM map and figure are not presented as the data will be inaccurate.
- SOUTHCOM: Complete TMDS data for week 48 and 49 is currently not available. Therefore, SOUTHCOM data is incomplete and will not be provided.

DHA - Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 9 December 2017 (Week 49)

- Influenza activity continues to increase, with five more states reporting widespread activity to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Although influenza activity is increasing, no cases of influenza-associated hospitalizations have been reported in DRSi for week 49.
- Vaccine compliance is high among Army populations, yet the most recent CDC estimate of vaccine compliance in the civilian sector is around 39% in the United States. So far this season, CDC reported the most commonly identified strain was influenza A (H3N2). In previous years when H3N2 was the dominant strain, influenza vaccines were less effective.
- In week 49, 220 influenza A-positive specimens were reported by Army medical treatment facilities, which is a 58% increase from the 139 positive specimens reported in week 48. Despite low vaccine effectiveness estimates, military leaders are encouraged to continue to accelerate vaccine receipt among SMs and prepare for the potential impact of the flu on operational readiness. APHC

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

During week 49 (December 3-9, 2017), influenza activity increased in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 49 was influenza A. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories increased.
- Novel Influenza A Virus: One human infection with a novel influenza A virus was
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 49/2017 (4-10 December 2017)

- Influenza activity across Europe remained at low levels.
- Of the individuals sampled, on presenting with ILI or ARI to sentinel primary healthcare sites, 11% tested positive for influenza viruses, which is similar to that in the previous week (13%).
- Data from 20 countries or regions reporting to the EuroMOMO project indicated that all-cause excess mortality was within normal ranges for this time of year.

European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

14 December - Febrile respiratory illness cases:

- Military Recruits - 15 positive of 35 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 38 positive of 65 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 6 positive of 15 tested. Naval Health Research Center

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Company recalls salami, prosciutto over possible salmonella contamination

18 December - A Canadian-based manufacturer is recalling ready-to-eat salami and speck products that are sold and distributed in the U.S. over concerns of possible salmonella contamination. Piller’s Fine Foods announced on Saturday that the recall affects “Black Kassel Piller’s Dry Aged D’Amour Salami” and “Black Kassel Piller’s Dry Aged Speck Smoked Prosciutto.” Both products are sold with a best-before date of May 12, 2018, and were shipped to distribution centers in Michigan, California, Illinois, New Jersey and New York, according to The Lansing State Journal. While no illnesses have been reported, consumers are instructed to discard the product or return it for a refund. Fox News
Lactalis extends baby product recall after finding contamination source

21 December - Dairy giant Lactalis announced on Thursday a further recall of baby food products after establishing a source of contamination at a French factory which has been linked to cases of *Salmonella* bacteria. Lactalis said it was recalling as a precaution all infant formula and other baby food products made at its factory in Craon, northwest France, since Feb. 15, which would represent 720 batches in addition to more than 600 batches already concerned by recent withdrawals. The latest recall affected products destined for both French and overseas markets carrying the Picot, Milumel and Taranis brands, Lactalis said in a statement. Reuters

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WELLNESS

Could a zap to the brain derail destructive impulses?

18 December - Picture this: While reaching for the cookie jar — or cigarette or bottle of booze or other temptation — a sudden slap denies your outstretched hand. When the urge returns, out comes another slap. Now imagine those "slaps" occurring inside the brain, protecting you in moments of weakness. ... Stanford neuroscientists say they've achieved this sort of mind-reading in binge-eating mice. They found a telltale pattern of brain activity that comes up seconds before the animals start to pig out — and delivering a quick zap to that part of the brain kept the mice from overindulging. Whether this strategy could block harmful impulses in people remains unclear. For now the path seems promising. The current study used a brain stimulation device already approved for hard-to-treat epilepsy. And based on the new findings, a clinical trial testing this off-the-shelf system for some forms of obesity could start as early as next summer, says Casey Halpern, the study’s leader. ... He thinks the approach could also work for eating disorders and a range of other addictive or potentially life-threatening urges. NPR

Diet rich in apples and tomatoes may help repair lungs of ex-smokers, study suggests

21 December - A study from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found the natural decline in lung function over a 10-year period was slower among former smokers with a diet high in tomatoes and fruits, especially apples, suggesting certain components in these foods might help restore lung damage caused by smoking. The researchers found that adults who on average ate more than two tomatoes or more than three portions of fresh fruit a day had a slower decline in lung function compared to those who ate less than one tomato or less than one portion of fruit a day, respectively. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News
Food and Drug Administration plans crackdown on risky homeopathic remedies

18 December - The Food and Drug Administration plans to take action against risky homeopathic remedies under a policy unveiled Monday. The Food and Drug Administration said it plans to crack down on the sale of some homeopathic products. The agency unveiled a new, risk-based approach to regulating homeopathic treatments Monday that aims to protect the public from dangerous products. ... Critics have been especially concerned about products being contaminated with dangerous substances, or sold for serious conditions for which other, proven treatments work. ... Under the new policy, the FDA will more carefully scrutinize these products, especially those sold to treat infants and children, those containing ingredients with significant safety concerns, such as belladonna, and those sold for serious conditions such as opioid addiction, heart disease and cancer. NPR

Industry is tackling opioid abuse as Washington drags its feet

15 December - Congress still can’t agree on directing more dollars to combat the U.S. opioid crisis. But over the past year, private industry has stepped up its own efforts to stem the troubling tide of overdose deaths from prescription painkillers and other opiate drugs. Over the course of 2017, insurers and drugmakers announced new goals to reduce the prescribing of opioid painkillers, limit how many pills patients can get at one time and give them better access to medication-assisted treatment. Furthermore, new medications came on the market to help those struggling with addiction. ... This is where insurers see their niche in the opioid war — in narrowing the doorway to overprescribing while opening it wider to the kinds of treatments and providers that give patients the best results. The Washington Post

Investigation of a Salmonella infection linked to rattlesnake pills

19 December - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment have linked one person’s Salmonella Oranienburg infection to taking rattlesnake pills. Rattlesnake pills are often marketed as remedies for various conditions, such as cancer and HIV infection. These pills contain dehydrated rattlesnake meat ground into a powder and put into pill form. ... Epidemiologic and laboratory evidence indicate that one person in Kansas became sick after taking rattlesnake pills purchased in Mexico. CDC

Miscarriage rates triple for women with top radiation exposures

20 December - Pregnant women exposed to high radiation levels from sources like cell phones, wireless devices and cell towers miscarried at nearly three times the rate as those
exposed to low levels, according to new research. "I hope this study makes us rethink the notion that magnetic field non-ionizing radiation exposure is safe or has no health risk," said lead author Dr. De-Kun Li. ... Cell phones, cordless phones and other wireless devices, appliances, power lines, smart-meter networks and cell towers generate non-ionizing radiation from magnetic fields. Writing in Scientific Reports, Li and his team call rapidly proliferating electromagnetic field emissions “a ubiquitous environmental exposure and a serious looming public health challenge.” Reuters

The risk of teen depression and suicide is linked to smartphone use, study says

17 December - A new study found that teenagers are increasingly depressed, feel hopeless and are more likely to consider suicide. Researchers found a sudden increase in teens' symptoms of depression, suicide risk factors and suicide rates in 2012 — around the time when smartphones became popular, says Jean Twenge, one of the authors of the study. Twenge's research found that teens who spend five or more hours per day on their devices are 71 percent more likely to have one risk factor for suicide. And that's regardless of the content consumed. Whether teens are watching cat videos or looking at something more serious, the amount of screen time ... goes hand in hand with the higher instances of depression. "... So half an hour, an hour a day, that seemed to be the sweet spot for teen mental health in terms of electronic devices," Twenge says. NPR

Why sitting may be bad for your heart

20 December - ... [A] surprising new study ... finds that the more people sit, the greater the likelihood that they will show signs of injury to their heart muscles. ... But how sitting, which seems to demand so little from the heart, could be linked to heart failure, a condition in which the heart cannot respond adequately to exertion, has been unclear. ... Troponins are proteins produced by cardiac-muscle cells when they are hurt or dying. A heart attack releases a sudden tsunami of troponins into the bloodstream. But even slightly elevated troponin levels, lower than those involved in heart attacks, are worrisome if they persist, most cardiologists believe. Chronically high troponin levels indicate that something is going wrong inside the heart muscle and that damage is occurring and accruing there. ... [Researchers] checked the men's and women's blood samples for troponins and the readouts from their activity trackers to see how much or little they had moved most days. ... [P]eople who sat for 10 hours or more tended to have above-average troponin levels in their blood. These levels were well below those indicative of a heart attack. But they were high enough to constitute "subclinical cardiac injury," according to the study's authors. The New York Times
USAFRICOM

Africa: Six lessons in helping African women avoid H.I.V.

15 December - Six short videos were released last week describing how a Kenyan nonprofit organization tackles one of Africa's toughest missions: helping young women protect themselves against H.I.V. The videos are part of an effort to get PrEP — pre-exposure prophylaxis — to African women. Even though PrEP, in the form of a pill containing the anti-H.I.V. drug tenofovir, is over 99 percent effective when taken every day, it has been an uphill battle even to get gay American men to embrace it. ... South Africa and Kenya have both adopted it, but donors worry that it will be even harder for African women to accept, for many cultural reasons. The history of H.I.V. prevention in Africa, especially for women, has not been encouraging. The New York Times

Nigeria: Nigeria monkeypox outbreak grows to 61 confirmed cases

19 December - According to an updated situation report from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), there are now 61 monkeypox cases in that country, 5 more than last month. This is Africa's largest-ever monkeypox outbreak. The 61 lab-confirmed cases have occurred in 10 states, with 172 suspected cases reported from 23 states since the outbreak began earlier this fall. So far, one death has been attributed to monkeypox, with most patients recovering within 3 weeks of symptom onset. The NCDC said there has been a decline in the number of suspected cases over the last 5 weeks. ... According to the NCDC, only 7% of the current cases in Nigeria have been linked to human-to-human transmission, including one healthcare worker. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

Sierra Leone: Ebola victims sue Sierra Leone government over mismanaged funds

15 December - Two Ebola survivors in Sierra Leone filed a lawsuit in a regional court on Friday, accusing the government of mismanaging funds during an epidemic that killed more than 3,000 people in the West African nation. More than 11,300 people died in total during the worst outbreak of the highly contagious disease, which mainly affected Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone from 2013 to 2016. Foreign governments and health organizations poured millions of dollars into the three nations to halt the epidemic's spread, but local authorities in Sierra Leone were dogged by allegations of corruption and misuse of the funds. Sierra Leone's government has pledged to investigate any accusations but so far there have been no prosecutions related to misspent government Ebola resources. Reuters
Pakistan/Syria: More polio reported in Pakistan, Syria

15 December - According to the latest Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) report, health officials confirmed one new wild poliovirus 1 in Pakistan last week. The child had symptom onset on Nov 9. Also, Syria has four new vaccine-derived polio cases, all in the previously affected Deir ez-Zur governorate. There are now six officially reported wild poliovirus cases in Pakistan in 2017. The GPEI said next week’s report will contain details on another case in Balochistan province. Pakistan, along with Afghanistan and Nigeria, is one of three countries in the world where wild poliovirus is still circulating. Last year Pakistan had 18 wild poliovirus cases. Syria now has 74 type 2 circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV2) cases in 2017. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

Yemen: Suspected cholera cases in Yemen hit 1 million

21 December - The number of suspected cholera cases in Yemen has hit 1 million, the International Committee of the Red Cross said on Thursday, as war has left more than 80 percent of the population short of food, fuel, clean water and access to healthcare. ... The World Health Organization has recorded 2,219 deaths since the cholera epidemic began in April, with children accounting for nearly a third of infections. ... Yemen’s health system has virtually collapsed, with most health workers unpaid for months. On Dec 3, the WHO said another wave of cholera could strike within months after the Saudi-led coalition closed air, land and sea access, cutting off fuel for hospitals and water pumps and aid supplies for starving children. Reuters

Poland: 550 hepatitis A cases reported in Warsaw

20 December - Hepatitis A outbreaks have been reported throughout Europe in 2017 with several EU countries reporting large increases in hepatitis A cases compared to previous years, mainly affecting men who have sex with men. Poland has seen a huge increase in cases this year compared to recent previous years. According to a Radio Poland report, there were 1,685 cases between January and the end of September. This compares to 35 cases of the disease were reported in 2016 and 49 reported in 2015. In the capital city of Warsaw, 551 hepatitis A cases have been reported in the first 11 months of 2017. Spokeswoman for the State Provincial Sanitary Inspectorate, Joanna Narożniak said that the "cause of the outbreak is as yet unknown." Outbreak News Today
Ukraine: Parents in Ukraine wary of vaccinations even as measles numbers rise

17 December - "Ukraine is on the verge of a measles epidemic," says Yevhen Komarovsky, a leading pediatrician in the Ukrainian capital. ... "If we take into consideration the [low] level of vaccination, then the mortality rates are practically miraculous," Komarovsky notes. "We are still very lucky." However, he warns that "in 2018, unfortunately, the situation should get worse." ... According to 2016 data from the World Health Organization (WHO), Ukraine ranks last in terms of measles-vaccination coverage in Europe. ... Cases of measles are 20 times higher in 2017 compared to the previous year, according to data from Ukraine's Health Ministry. ... UNICEF's representative in Ukraine has written that "myths about vaccinations being potentially harmful," has in large part "meant that Ukraine's coverage against measles dramatically dropped from 97 percent in 2007 to 42 percent in 2016."

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

United Kingdom: Half of young people do not use condoms for sex with new partner – poll

14 December - Almost half of sexually active young people do not use a condom when sleeping with someone for the first time, and more than one-third of young people think carrying protection is a sign someone is promiscuous, a survey has found. One in 10 sexually active 16 to 24-year-olds, the age group that accounted for 59% of chlamydia and gonorrhoea diagnoses in England last year, said they had never used a condom, prompting calls from the Royal College of GPs for investment in sexual and reproductive health services. ... Despite the high rates of sexually transmitted infections among young people, 58% said the main reason for using condoms was to avoid pregnancy, compared with 29% for avoiding infections. Despite the high rates of sexually transmitted infections among young people, 58% said the main reason for using condoms was to avoid pregnancy, compared with 29% for avoiding infections. The Guardian

United Kingdom: Measles in England

20 December - Health officials in England have reported an outbreak of measles. ... CDC recommends that travelers to England protect themselves by making sure they are vaccinated against measles with the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine. ... Clinicians should keep measles in mind when treating patients with fever and rash, especially if the patient has recently traveled internationally. CDC

United Kingdom: UK suicide rate shows largest drop for 20 years

18 December - Suicide rates in the UK have seen the largest decrease in 20 years, official figures reveal. There were 3.6% fewer suicides registered in 2016 than in 2015 - a decrease by 223 deaths from 6,188, Office for National Statistics data shows. Rates fell for both men
and women, although men still account for three-quarters of cases. Experts believe the drop shows suicide-prevention initiatives are helping. For deaths registered in 2016 in the UK:
  
  - people aged 40 to 44 years had the highest suicide rate - 15.3 per 100,000
  - this age group also had the highest rate among males - 24.1 per 100,000
  - the age group with the highest rate for females was 50 to 54 years. BBC News

USNORTHCOM

U.S.: A prescription to reduce waste in health care spending

21 December - ... Increases in medical costs have substantially outpaced economic growth for decades. In recent months, ProPublica has shown that it doesn’t have to be this way. It’s been estimated that the U.S. health care system wastes about $765 billion a year — about a quarter of what’s spent. ... It’s possible to reduce or eliminate some of the waste, but there are also formidable forces that benefit from it. Excess spending generates revenue and profit for what some have called the "medical industrial complex," said Dr. H. Gilbert Welch. ... Hospitals routinely toss out brand-new supplies and gently used equipment. Most of it goes to the dump, but some gets picked up by nonprofit organizations that ship the goods to the developing world. ... Every year nursing homes nationwide flush, burn or throw out tons of valuable prescription drugs. Iowa collects them and gives them to needy patients for free. Most other states don’t. NPR

U.S.: California officials say housing next to freeways is a health risk — but they fund it anyway

17 December - It’s the type of project Los Angeles desperately needs in a housing crisis: low-cost apartments for seniors, all of them veterans, many of them homeless. There’s just one downside. Wedged next to an off-ramp, the four-story building will stand 200 feet from the 5 Freeway. State officials have for years warned against building homes within 500 feet of freeways, where people suffer higher rates of asthma, heart disease, cancer and other health problems linked to car and truck pollution. Yet they’re helping build the 96-unit complex, providing $11.1 million in climate change funds from California’s cap-and-trade program. Los Angeles Times
U.S.: Don’t keep cell phones next to your body, California Health Department warns

15 December - The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued a warning against the hazards of cellphone radiation this week. ... The CDPH asks people to decrease their use of these devices and suggests keeping your distance when possible. “Although the science is still evolving, there are concerns among some public health professionals and members of the public regarding long-term, high use exposure to the energy emitted by cell phones,” said CDPH director Dr. Karen Smith. The warning comes after findings were offered up this week from a 2009 department document, which was published after an order from the Sacramento Superior Court. A year ago, UC Berkeley professor Joel Moskowitz initiated a lawsuit to get the department to release the findings after he started looking into whether mobile phone use increased the risk of tumors. Tech Crunch

U.S.: FDA finalizes rule on healthcare antiseptics

20 December - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) yesterday finalized a rule that bans marketing of over-the-counter healthcare antiseptics containing triclosan and 23 other active antimicrobial agents. But six other active ingredients are getting a temporary pass. The rule, first proposed in 2015, was issued by the FDA after the agency found that the ingredients were not generally recognized as safe and effective for use in the type of antiseptic products commonly used in healthcare settings, such as hand washes, rubs, and patient antiseptic skin preparations. ... “Ensuring the safety and effectiveness of over-the-counter health care antiseptics has been a priority for the FDA, not only because these products are an important component of infection control strategies in health care settings, but also because of the role these products may play in contributing to antimicrobial resistance if they're not manufactured or used appropriately,” FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb, MD, said in a news release. CIDRAP

U.S.: In 'defense of science,' researchers sue EPA over move to overhaul advisory boards

21 December - A group of the Environmental Protection Agency's current and former advisory board members sued it Thursday over Administrator Scott Pruitt's controversial decision to bar scientists who receive agency grants from serving as outside advisers. Calling the new policy “unlawful, arbitrary and capricious,” the complaint filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia argues Pruitt did not have authority to change the agency's ethics rules. A handful of environmental advocacy and public health organizations also joined the lawsuit. In announcing the policy in October, Pruitt said his intention was to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure the objectivity of the agency's 22 advisory committees. The Washington Post
U.S.: Judge blocks Trump administration rules on contraceptive coverage

15 December - A U.S. judge on Friday blocked President Donald Trump’s administration from moving forward with new rules that undermined an Obamacare requirement for employers to provide health insurance that covers women’s birth control. U.S. District Judge Wendy Beetlestone in Philadelphia issued a preliminary injunction preventing enforcement of rules the administration announced in October that allowed businesses or non-profits to obtain exemptions on moral or religious grounds. Beetlestone wrote that Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, a Democrat who sued to block the rules, was likely to succeed in establishing that the administration did not follow proper notice procedures when issuing the new rules. The judge said the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Labor and the Department of Treasury had also interpreted the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, “in a manner inconsistent with its text.” Reuters

U.S.: Life expectancy drops again as opioid deaths surge in U.S.

21 December - Life expectancy in the U.S. fell for the second year in a row in 2016, nudged down again by a surge in fatal opioid overdoses, federal officials report Thursday. “I'm not prone to dramatic statements,” says Robert Anderson, chief of the mortality statistics branch at the National Center for Health Statistics. “But I think we should be really alarmed. The drug overdose problem is a public health problem and it needs to be addressed. We need to get a handle on it.” The trend is especially concerning because life expectancy is considered an important indicator of the general well-being of a nation. ... The last time the U.S. life expectancy dropped was in 1993 because of the AIDS epidemic. Life expectancy hasn’t fallen two years in a row in the U.S. since the early 1960s. ... According to the latest analysis, U.S. life expectancy fell from 78.7 in 2015 to 78.6 in 2016. That follows a drop from 78.9 in 2014 that researchers hoped would be an aberration. NPR

U.S.: More Candida auris infections recorded in U.S.

18 December - According to an updated case count from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are now 174 cases of Candida auris infections in the United States, 17 more than the CDC reported last month. As of Nov 30, the multidrug-resistant (MDR) fungus has been identified in healthcare facilities in 10 states. ... The CDC said 257 other patients have been colonized with C auris detected through targeted screening in four states with clinical cases. CIDRAP Stewardship/Resistance Scan (first item)

U.S.: NIH lifts funding pause on gain-of-function research

19 November - Today, the National Institutes of Health announced that it is lifting a funding pause dating back to October 2014 on gain-of-function (GOF) experiments involving
influenza, SARS, and MERS viruses. GOF research is important in helping us identify, understand, and develop strategies and effective countermeasures against rapidly evolving pathogens that pose a threat to public health. The funding pause was lifted in response to today’s release of the Department of Health and Human Services Framework for Guiding Funding Decisions about Proposed Research Involving Enhanced Potential Pandemic Pathogens. This framework formalizes robust oversight for federally funded research with enhanced pathogens of pandemic potential. NIH


22 December - Analysis of data from the 2011–2014 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey examining the association between obesity and education and obesity and income among U.S. adults demonstrate that obesity prevalence patterns by income vary between women and men and by race/Hispanic origin. The prevalence of obesity decreased with increasing income in women (from 45.2% to 29.7%), but there was no difference in obesity prevalence between the lowest (31.5%) and highest (32.6%) income groups among men. Moreover, obesity prevalence was lower among college graduates than among persons with less education for non-Hispanic white women and men, non-Hispanic black women, and Hispanic women, but not for non-Hispanic Asian women and men or non-Hispanic black or Hispanic men. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: States' report card highlights threat of weather, infectious diseases

19 December - Today Trust for America’s Health (TFAH), a Washington, D.C.–based health advocacy group, in its annual report card ranking states' preparedness for public health threats, noted that the leading challenges this year took the form of natural weather disasters, including hurricanes Harvey and Irma. "Preparedness was weather-related this year," said John Auerbach, MBA, the president and chief executive officer of TFAH, in a press conference. "But preparedness is inconsistent across states." The report also noted that preparedness in general—including for infectious disease threats—was down among states compared with last year, and preparedness is being undermined by underfunding. Experts also underscored the problem of vaccine hesitancy. CIDRAP

U.S.: Trump administration reportedly instructs CDC on its own version of 7 dirty words

16 December – Trump Administration officials at the Department of Health and Human Services are pushing back on a report saying the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a mandate to no longer use words and phrases including "fetus," "transgender" and "science-based." According to The Washington Post, the directive was delivered to senior CDC officials responsible for overseeing the health agency's budget. [HHS] issued a statement, calling the existence of a set of banned words a "complete mischaracterization."
Spokesperson Matt Lloyd adds: "... HHS will continue to use the best scientific evidence available to improve the health of all Americans. HHS also strongly encourages the use of outcome and evidence data in program evaluations and budget decisions." The seven words that were to be stricken from official documents being drafted for the 2019 fiscal year budget, according to the Post, are: [diversity, entitlement, evidence-based, fetus, science-based, transgender, and vulnerable.] NPR

USPACOM

Myanmar: How counting the dead will help the living

14 December - In Myanmar, most deaths occur at home and only a quarter are certified by doctors. That’s worrisome, since not knowing why people die can undermine efforts to save lives. Now, innovative methods for counting the dead are being rolled out in the Southeast Asian nation, revealing previously under-appreciated patterns of disease that may change health policies and strategies. ... The data-gathering relies on midwives quizzing family members. The answers to a questionnaire are then entered into a computer tablet that uses a software algorithm to come up with a probable cause of death. Results from the first 5,000 deaths collected from more than a dozen townships or districts are already challenging perceptions that pneumonia and diarrhea are among the biggest causes of death. Stroke and heart disease are instead coming up among the top killers. Bloomberg

Myanmar: UNHCR survey of Myanmar refugees finds health, safety worries, but community spirit strong

19 December - As the refugee emergency in Bangladesh enters its fourth month, people are continuing to arrive from Myanmar however the pace of the influx has now slowed. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency estimates average arrival rates have dropped from 745 per day in November to 100 per day so far this month. ... Meanwhile a quick refugee assessment by UNHCR and 13 international and local partners in Bangladesh has found that the refugees have developed strong support networks. ... Access to sanitation is still insufficient. ... Women and girls are anxious about the shortage of private bathing spaces. ... Increased mental health support for those who have witnessed the killings or suffered torture or rape remains crucially needed. Refugees cite continued feelings of depression and rejection, especially among the elderly and disabled. ... Some refugees said that irregular food distributions and long queues had meant going hungry for days. The UN Refugee Agency
North Korea: North Korea begins tests to load anthrax onto ICBMs

20 December - North Korea has begun tests to load anthrax onto intercontinental ballistic missiles, Asahi Shimbun reported Tuesday, citing an unidentified person connected to South Korea’s intelligence services. The report said the testing involves ensuring the anthrax survives the immense temperatures generated during re-entry into the Earth’s atmosphere. North Korea has a stockpile of between 2,500 to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons, and is capable of producing biological agents such as anthrax and smallpox, South Korea has previously said. The Asahi report comes a day after the White House published its National Security Strategy, a document that said Pyongyang is “pursuing chemical and biological weapons which could also be delivered by missile.” The Japan Times

Thailand: Thailand battles drug-resistant malaria strains that imperil global campaign

15 December - ... Thailand’s border town of Bo Rai finds itself on the frontline of a new battle against drug-resistant strains of malaria that could frustrate global attempts to stamp out the disease. ... [T]he latest drug-resistant form ... emerged in Cambodia before spreading to Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. “What we are concerned about is that a patient with the disease travels between countries and that risks the spread of infection,” said Vicharn Phatirat. ... Health officials monitor victims of the mosquito-borne disease closely, to ensure they complete their treatment, which limits chances for the disease to become resistant to drugs, as well as to identify carriers of resistant strains. Still resistance is emerging in Southeast Asia to the drugs artemisinin and piperaquine, critical in the fight against malaria. Reuters

PAHO confirms yellow fever cases in Brazil, Peru

15 December - The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) this week noted that both Brazil and Peru have confirmed yellow fever cases in the second half of 2017. PAHO said both countries should be closely monitored in the new year. Since Oct 27, officials have confirmed 3 cases of yellow fever in Brazil, 2 in Sao Paulo and 1 in Rio de Janeiro state. In Sao Paulo, the Itatiba municipality was the probable site of infection, and Guapimirim municipality was the probable site of infection in Rio de Janeiro. One of the patients in Sao Paolo, a 76-year-old man, died. A total of 43 probable yellow fever cases are still under investigation in Brazil. Peru has had 17 confirmed and probable cases this year, including 3 fatalities. Six of the cases have occurred in the Junin department, more than in any other
department. PAHO said 2016 yielded the highest number of human and epizootic yellow fever cases seen in decades. "The observed increase is as much related to an ecosystem favorable to the dissemination of the virus as to the unimmunized populations," PAHO said.

CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)

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