

25 March 2016

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry

Toxins in burn pit smoke may affect the skin, eyes, respiratory and cardiovascular systems, gastrointestinal tract and internal organs. Researchers are looking into the potential for long-term health effects. Record your exposures in the #BurnPitRegistry, and discuss any concerns with a provider during an optional registry evaluation.



U.S. MILITARY

Army base's policy to let soldiers sleep in benefits their health, report finds

21 March - A US Army base's physical training program that snarled traffic in the area but allowed soldiers to sleep in before beginning work is being praised by officials in a report on the force's fitness. According to the Denver Post, Fort Carson's policy to allow soldiers to begin work later and exercise in the afternoon during a 2014 pilot program was one of several factors that made it stand out in the Health of the Force report. ... The report on the army's largest installations found Fort Carson soldiers to be above average in their medical readiness for combat, and felled by fewer injuries than their peers with a lower rate of mental illness and chronic disease. Fort Carson soldier's also had a lower obesity rate than others. [Fox News](#)

Bladder cancer and hyperthyroidism linked to Agent Orange

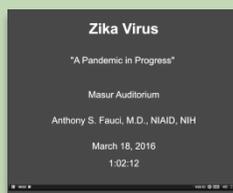
17 March - There is "limited or suggestive evidence" that links Agent Orange exposure to bladder cancer and hyperthyroidism according to the biennial review of the Committee to Review the Health Effects in Vietnam Veterans of Exposure to Herbicides. The committee reviewed results from a study of veterans of the Korean War who also served in the Vietnam War that suggested an association for bladder cancer and hypothyroidism. The evidence, along with supportive epidemiologic findings, led the committee to strengthen the association between Agent Orange exposure and bladder cancer and hyperthyroidism. [Federal Practitioner](#)

Incident and recurrent *Chlamydia trachomatis* and *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* infections, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2010–2014

March 2016 - ... [Between] 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2014 ... a total of 66,396 initial chlamydia and 9,138 initial gonorrhea cases were diagnosed. Annual crude rates of initial chlamydia infections increased by 23%. Crude rates of initial gonorrhea infections remained stable overall, but female rates decreased by 28.3% over the period. Among the incident cohorts, 11,699 cases of repeat chlamydia, and 1,138 cases of repeat gonorrhea were diagnosed over the period, accounting for 15.0% and 11.1% of overall cohort chlamydia and gonorrhea infections, respectively. The Army branch, those aged 17–19 years, females, non-Hispanic black service members, junior enlisted ranks, and single/never-married service members had the highest crude rates of initial chlamydia and gonorrhea infection, and (single/never-married service members excepted) highest adjusted relative risk of repeat chlamydia infection. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

NIH: Zika Virus - A Pandemic in Progress

In this video from March 18, 2016, Dr. Fauci discusses the history of Zika virus, the current pandemic, and the biomedical research response, including diagnostic, therapeutics and vaccine development.



PTSD may stiffen veterans' arteries, boosting heart risks

23 March - Veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may have blood vessels that don't expand normally, a new study suggests. If vessels don't widen as they should, the risk of heart attack and stroke goes up, the researchers noted. The researchers also found that risk factors usually associated with blood vessel problems -- such as high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and smoking -- didn't seem to account for why people with PTSD were more likely to have blood vessels that didn't dilate properly. The researchers suspect that stress may be to blame. ... While the study found a link between PTSD and blood vessel health, it wasn't designed to prove a cause-and-effect relationship. ... The researchers found that blood vessels of veterans with PTSD had a less healthy response. Their blood vessels expanded just under 6 percent, compared with 7.5 percent among the veterans without PTSD. [Medline Plus](#)

VA expands access to hepatitis C treatment

22 March - Backed by increased funding from Congress, the VA announced that it would now cover hepatitis C (HCV) treatment for all veterans. The VA estimates that there are 174,000 veterans with HCV infection and that it could spend about \$1 billion to treat these veterans in fiscal year (FY) 2016 alone. Previously the VA had limited access to the new generation of expensive oral direct-acting antivirals (DAAs) that promised to cure HCV for most veterans. "To manage limited resources previously, we established treatment priority for the sickest patients," said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. David J. Shulkin in a statement. "If veterans are currently waiting on an appointment for community care through the Choice Program, they can now turn to their local VA facility for this treatment or can elect to continue to receive treatment through the Choice Program." [Federal Practitioner](#)

Veterans are using pot to ease PTSD, despite scant research

22 March - A growing number of states are weighing whether to legalize marijuana to treat post-traumatic stress disorder. But for many veterans, the debate is already over. They're increasingly using cannabis even though it remains illegal in most states and is unapproved by the Department of Veterans Affairs because major studies have yet to show it is effective against PTSD. While the research has been contradictory and limited, some former members of the military say pot helps them manage their anxiety, insomnia and nightmares. Prescription drugs such as Klonopin and Zoloft weren't effective or left them feeling like zombies, some say. ... Others, though, have seen little benefit from the drug. And the VA has documented a troubling rise in the number of PTSD-afflicted veterans who have been diagnosed with marijuana dependence, which some experts say can hamper recovery from war trauma. [AP](#)

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USDA FoodKeeper Application

The USDA's application tells how to store food and beverages to maximize their freshness and quality.

The application features include:

- Specific product pages for more than 400 items. These offer users storage timelines for the refrigerator, freezer, and pantry.
- Cooking tips for meat, poultry, seafood and egg products. Cooking advice is offered to ensure users prepare these products in ways that eliminate foodborne bacteria.
- Calendar integration, which allows users to enter the purchase date for products and offers notifications when products are nearing the end of their recommended storage date.

The application is available for [Android](#) and [Apple](#) devices.



GLOBAL

Co-infection of ticks: the rule rather than the exception

17 March - Ticks transmit more pathogens than any other arthropod, and one single species can transmit a large variety of bacteria and parasites. Because co-infection might be much more common than previously thought, we evaluated the prevalence of 38 known or neglected tick-borne pathogens in *Ixodes ricinus* ticks. Our results demonstrated that co-infection occurred in almost half of the infected ticks, and that ticks could be infected with up to five pathogens. Moreover, as it is well established that symbionts can affect pathogen transmission in arthropods, we also evaluated the prevalence of four symbiont species and demonstrated that all ticks were infected by at least one microorganism.

[PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases](#)

FDA approves injectable agent for anthrax under Animal Rule

21 March - A new injectable drug, obiltoximab (Anthim), was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Mar 18 for treating inhalational anthrax when alternatives are not available or appropriate, according to a press release today from the agency. The drug, which is used along with appropriate antibacterial agents, is a monoclonal antibody that neutralizes toxins produced by *Bacillus anthracis*, the causal organism of anthrax. Anthim was approved under FDA's Animal Rule, which allows results of efficacy studies in animals for support when trials in humans would not be feasible or ethical. Safety in humans was established in a trial of 320 healthy volunteers. Headache, pruritus, upper respiratory infections, cough, congestion, hives, bruising, and swelling and/or pain at the injection site were the most frequently reported side effects. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (fourth item)

Homelessness, HIV, and HCV

March 2016 - According to researchers ... homelessness and unstable housing situations are associated with higher rates of HIV and hepatitis C infection (HCV). They reviewed 152 studies involving 139,757 participants who had HIV or were co-infected with HCV. The researchers found "strong evidence" that the lack of stable, secure, adequate housing is a significant barrier to consistent and appropriate medical care, adherence to treatment, sustained viral suppression, and reduction of risk behaviors. Research data showed that the worse the housing status, the less the engagement and utilization of HIV medical care. Homeless patients had more emergency department (ED) admissions; homeless males had longer hospital stays; and homeless injection-drug users were more often hospitalized than were people with HIV in high socioeconomic neighborhoods. [Federal Practitioner](#)

Classified Version of the Weekly Update

An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the **SECRET** level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site:

<http://phc.army.smil.mil>

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

To access this version, you will need a **SECRET** clearance and a SIPRNet account.

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Leading global health commission calls for reform of drug policies worldwide

24 March - A leading global public health commission is calling for new policies that would transform our approach to drug use, addiction and control worldwide. ... According to a report released this morning by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and The Lancet, the war on drugs and zero-tolerance policies have undercut public health across the globe and have directly contributed to many of today's most urgent public health crises, while doing little to affect drug markets or drug use. ... [The policy] calls for worldwide reform of drug policies, including: the decriminalization of minor and non-violent drug use, possession and petty sale; enactment of policies that reduce violence and discrimination in drug policing; increased access to controlled medicines that could reduce the risk of overdose deaths; and greater investments in health and social services for drug users.

[Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News](#)

More details emerge on German, US Lassa cases linked to Togo

23 March - The World Health Organization (WHO) today released more details on two linked American Lassa fever patients who had worked in Togo. ... The index case involved a 47-year-old American man who worked as a healthcare provider in the Savanes region of northern Togo. He [was] medically evacuated to Cologne, Germany, on Feb 25. The man died of multiple organ failure... ... Secondary infections involve an American physician's assistant who cared for the index patient in Togo and a German funeral home worker who handled the deceased's body. The American patient ... [was] evacuated to the Emory University Hospital in Georgia on Mar 12, where he ...remains isolated in stable condition. ... The German patient ... wore gloves and was not exposed to bodily fluids when he handled the remains. ... [He] is being cared for in a special isolation unit in Frankfurt, along with four family members who have been voluntarily quarantined. [CIDRAP](#)

New international research reinforces the link between public policy and life expectancy

21 March - While average life expectancy has been rising steadily in most countries over the past century, new research led by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) shows that life expectancy declined significantly and rapidly in three countries where policy changes increased access to prescription opioids, alcohol or illicit drugs. ... In the U.S., prescription opioids are used in larger quantities than in any other country. Usage started increasing rapidly in the mid-1990s, partly as a result of allowing family doctors to prescribe short-acting opioids such as oxycodone for chronic pain and other relatively common diseases. ... From 1999 to 2013, mortality increased by nine per cent in middle-aged white non-Hispanic Americans, despite life expectancy continuing to rise among other U.S. populations. ... [In] the USSR, after years of declines, life expectancy increased by 3.2 years for men and 1.3 years for women from 1984 to 1987 as policy reduced the supply of

alcohol. But, between 1987 and 1994, as restrictive alcohol policy was abandoned and alcohol became widely available, life expectancy fell by 7.3 years for men and 3.3 years for women. [PR Newswire](#)

Study notes difference in bacteria strains, clinical disease in US, European Lyme

23 March - Strains of *Borrelia burgdorferi*—the bacterium that causes Lyme disease—vary from Europe to the United States and cause more severe disease in US cases, according to a study yesterday in *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. ... They studied 29 Slovenian and 91 US samples. Genotyping of the isolates revealed two distinct genotypes. In addition, the investigators found that clinical features of the Slovenian patients were similar to infection with *B afzelii* or *B garinii*, the other two *Borrelia* species that cause Lyme disease in Europe. *B burgdorferi* strains from the United States, in comparison, were associated with more severe disease. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

ZIKA VIRUS

Brazil says confirmed and suspected microcephaly cases rise to 5,200

22 March - The number of confirmed and suspected cases of microcephaly in Brazil associated with the Zika virus rose to 5,200 in the week through March 19, from 5,131 a week earlier, the health ministry said on Tuesday. Of these, the number of confirmed cases climbed to 907 from 863 a week earlier, while suspected ones increased to 4,293 from 4,268 in the same period. Cases that have been ruled out hit 1,471 in the week through March 19. [Reuters](#)

CDC: 116 cases of Zika in U.S. residents in first 2 months of year

21 March - During the first two months of this year, 116 U.S. residents have tested positive for infection with the Zika virus, and all but one were linked to travel to regions endemic for the virus. That's according to a report released Friday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Experts there say that of the 116 cases confirmed between Jan. 1 and Feb. 26, 110 involved travel by the patient to a Zika-endemic area, while five involved sexual contact with a person who had recently traveled to such areas. The remaining case of infection occurred when a mother passed the virus to her child in pregnancy. No details were given on that case. ... "Among the 115 [U.S.] patients with travel-associated infection, all patients reported clinical illness," the CDC said. In the majority of cases, symptoms included rash (97 percent of cases), fever and joint pain. [Medline Plus](#)

Concerns grow over care of patients with serious Zika complications

22 March - As the evidence linking maternal Zika virus infections with microcephaly and other birth defects continues to grow—along with the number of countries and territories reporting cases—a shift in focus is needed away from individual cases and toward building health system capacities to care for affected patients and families, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Margaret Chan, MD, MPH, said today. [CIDRAP](#)

Lessons from rubella suggest Zika's impact could linger

22 March - As scientists struggle to understand the threat posed by Zika virus, there's another viral infection that's a known danger in pregnancy and that harms 100,000 babies a year, even though it has been preventable with a vaccine since 1969. The disease is rubella, or German measles. Like Zika, the rubella virus often causes either a mild rash or no symptoms at all. When women get rubella while pregnant, however, there can be devastating consequences for the fetus, including deafness, heart defects and even microcephaly. ... The United States had a huge rubella outbreak in the 1960s. ... As researchers try to figure out how much risk Zika virus poses to a fetus, Plotkin says it's *deja vu* for folks who lived through that extensive rubella outbreak. "It enabled the virologists, among them myself, to describe in detail what the virus was doing and to show beyond any doubt that the virus was infecting the fetus and causing the abnormalities," says Plotkin.

[NPR](#)

Puerto Rico braces for its own Zika epidemic

19 March - ... The outbreak is expected to be worse [in Puerto Rico] than anywhere else in the country. The island, a warm, wet paradise veined with gritty poverty, is the ideal environment for the mosquitoes carrying the virus. The landscape is littered with abandoned houses and discarded tires that are perfect breeding grounds for the insects. Some homes and schools lack window screens and air-conditioning, exposing residents to almost constant bites. The economy is in shambles, and thousands of civic workers needed to fight mosquitoes have been laid off. The chemical most often used against the adult pests no longer works, and the one needed to control their larvae has been pulled from the market by regulators. A quarter of the island's 3.5 million people will probably get the Zika virus within a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and eventually 80 percent or more may be infected. [The New York Times](#)

U.S. CDC urges doctors to prevent Zika spread during labor, delivery

22 March - U.S. health officials are reminding healthcare workers to use standard protective gear when delivering babies to prevent possible infection with Zika or transmission of the virus to newborns. The Zika virus that is quickly spreading in the Caribbean and the Americas is primarily transmitted by mosquito bites, but the virus has also been detected in

body fluids, including blood, urine, amniotic fluid and saliva, and several cases of sexual transmission have occurred. Because most people infected with the virus do not have symptoms, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that standard infection precautions be observed at all times, regardless of whether Zika is confirmed or suspected. [Reuters](#)

WHO backs trials of bacteria, genetic modification to fight Zika mosquitoes

18 March - The World Health Organization (WHO) called on Friday for pilot projects to test two experimental ways to curb Zika-carrying mosquitoes, including testing the release of genetically modified insects and bacteria that stop their eggs hatching. ... [The] WHO said its specialists had reviewed five potential new weapons against Aedes mosquitoes. Three - including sterile insect technique, vector traps and toxic sugar baits to attract and kill mosquitoes - were still too experimental to consider for scaled-up pilot projects, the WHO said. But a further two - releasing mosquitoes carrying *Wolbachia* bacteria, and using genetically modified, or transgenic, male mosquitoes to suppress the wild population - "warrant time-limited pilot deployment, accompanied by rigorous monitoring and evaluation". [Reuters](#)

Zika lurked In South America months before cases reported

24 March - The Zika virus was likely spreading in South America — silently — long before health officials detected it, scientists report Thursday. The findings ... suggest an air traveler brought the virus to the Americas sometime between May and December of 2013, or more than a year before Brazil reported the first cases of Zika in early 2015. ... To figure out how the outbreak began, a team of international scientists decoded the genomes of seven Zika viruses found in patients in Brazil. They then compared these sequences with nine other Zika viruses found in Latin America and Asia. ... The patterns in the Zika genes suggest the virus entered the Americas only once. And it likely came from French Polynesia, which had a large Zika outbreak in 2013. [NPR](#)

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INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 10:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity decreased this week and ranged from minimal to low for the majority of states.

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

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 12 March 2016 (Week 10)

Overall, influenza activity decreased slightly among Army populations. However, influenza activity continues to increase in the civilian population.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 10 were 10% higher than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Twelve hospitalized influenza cases were reported to APHC (Prov) through DRSi in week 10, all non-AD beneficiaries. Four of the cases were vaccinated; 8 had underlying conditions.
- Viral specimens: During week 10, 639 of 2172 (29%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-A reported 237 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-C reported 117, RHC-P reported 54, and RHC-E reported 18. CENTCOM did not report any positive influenza A specimens. [APHC](#)

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

During week 10 (March 6-12, 2016), influenza activity increased in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 10 was influenza A, with influenza A (H1N1)pdm09 viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories increased.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below their system-specific epidemic threshold in both the NCHS Mortality Surveillance System and the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System. [CDC](#)

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 10/2016 (7 – 13 March 2016)

- Influenza activity may have peaked in some parts of the Region, as only one country reported high-intensity influenza activity and the majority of the countries (93%) reported decreasing or stable trends.
- The proportion of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza virus showed a slight increase, to 48%, which is similar to the last four weeks.
- Influenza B virus constituted 62% of detections in sentinel samples collected this week,

which is higher than the previous week (55%), indicating a shift towards influenza B circulation.

- The number of cases of severe disease was lower than in previous weeks, but varied between countries. Most severe cases were associated with A(H1N1)pdm09 infection and were in people aged 15–64 years.

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

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For 2016 Week 11 (through 19 March 2016):

- Influenza: the NHRC laboratory confirmed one case of influenza (A/H3), four cases of influenza (A/H1), and one case of influenza B among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at Fort Leonard Wood and Fort Benning [Naval Health Research Center](#)

Study finds equal flu virus levels in coughs, exhalation

21 March - A study by researchers from the CDC and West Virginia University (WVU) found no significant difference between the amount of influenza A virus in symptomatic patients' coughing and exhaling. ... During the 2014-15 influenza season, 53 college students at WVU who tested positive for virus H3N2 forcibly exhaled and coughed, three times per method, into a spirometer. Thirty seven of these students (70%) transmitted the virus through coughing, exhaling, or both, indicating that even with the low sample size available, both transmission modes could be a common way for the virus to spread, according to the study. ... The difference between coughing and exhaling were statistically insignificant, supporting the theory that aerosols containing viable flu viruses reside more in the bronchioles and alveoli than in the upper respiratory system. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

Study shows progressive H5N1 genetic diversity and adaptation to humans

23 March - An analysis of H5N1 avian flu viruses in Egypt showed that an endemic clade has undergone rapid and persistent evolution in ways that may increase its transmissibility to humans. ... Researchers ... analyzed genetic mutations in H5N1 viruses, including ... an endemic clade that emerged in 2008 and has since become dominant. Most of the hemagglutinin sequences analyzed (224 of 368) were from the 2008 endemic clade, which has undergone wide geographic distribution throughout Egypt, resulting in increased live-bird-market detections. The endemic cluster demonstrated a high and persistent mutation rate over 6 years. ... Persistence of the endemic clade, its increased binding affinity in human cells, and the emergence of a new H5N1 endemic clade cluster in 2015 may be the result of poor avian vaccination practices and wide geographic distribution of the virus in Egypt, the authors said. [CIDRAP Flu Scan](#) (second item)

WHO: Influenza Update

21 March - Globally, high levels of influenza activity continued to be reported. In some

countries in northern Europe influenza B virus detections were increasing. In North America, influenza activity continued to increase and ARI and pneumonia activity were above thresholds in Mexico. In Northern Temperate Asia, influenza activity was ongoing with increasing levels of influenza B virus. [WHO](#)

WHO notes recent H7N9 clusters, details H5N6 case

23 March - Of 29 recent H7N9 avian flu cases in China, 6 were part of three small clusters, but with no sign of sustained spread, the World Health Organization (WHO) said today as it detailed a recent H5N6 avian flu case from China. ... The WHO said in a statement that the 29 [H7N9] cases reported by China reflect illness-onset dates between Jan 17 and Feb 19. Patient ages range from 21 to 78 years old, with a median age of 57. All but 7 of the patients were men, and 6 of the cases were fatal. ... Consistent with the country's past H7N9 pattern, most (24) of the people had a history of contact with poultry or exposure to live-poultry markets. ... China has reported seven H5N6 cases since the end of December, all in Guangdong province. The virus has been detected in poultry in a few Asian countries, but China is the only one that has reported human cases, 10 since the first detection in 2014. No details were available about the woman's exposure to the virus, but an earlier report on the case from Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection said the woman had visited a live-poultry market before she became ill. [CIDRAP](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

CDC blames raw milk in two 2014 *Listeria* cases, one fatal

21 March - Two cases of listeriosis that occurred in 2014 have been linked to raw milk produced by a Pennsylvania organic farm, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said today. Two people were hospitalized with *Listeria monocytogenes* infections in California and Florida in 2014, the CDC said. The patients were 73 and 81 years old and had consumed raw milk before becoming ill. The Florida patient died of listeriosis. Raw milk from Miller's Organic Farm in Bird-in-Hand, Pa., was identified as the probable source of both infections. [CIDRAP Foodborne Disease Scan](#) (first item)

Cucumber-linked *Salmonella* outbreak grows to 907 cases, declared over

21 March - In the 2 months since a previous update, illnesses in a cucumber-linked *Salmonella* Poona outbreak have risen by 19 to a total of 907 cases, the CDC said in a Mar 18 update, noting that the outbreak is now considered over. The outbreak, which was

attributed to cucumbers imported from Mexico and distributed by Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce, sickened people in 40 states and resulted in 6 deaths. ... Of 720 patients with information available, 204 (28%) were hospitalized. Illness-onset dates range from Jul 3, 2015, to Feb 29, 2016, and patients range in age from less than 1 year to 99 years. Nearly half (49%) were children, the CDC said. [CIDRAP Foodborne Disease Scan](#) (second item)

France confirms case of mad cow disease

24 March - France's agriculture ministry confirmed on Thursday that a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease, had been discovered in the northeastern region of Ardennes. The suspected case, found in a five-year-old cow, was identified last week during a test carried out on cattle older than 48 months after slaughter. The farm ministry said there was no risk to human health as all parts of the cow susceptible to being infected must be removed by slaughter houses. "The detection of this case does not affect the consumer," it said in a statement. "Beef consumption is safe for humans."

[Reuters](#)

Rules to guard against human exposure to BSE finalized by FDA

21 March - Interim rules aimed at minimizing human exposure to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), a progressive and fatal neurologic disorder of cattle, have been finalized, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Mar 17. The interim rules ... define specified risk materials (SRMs), meaning the cattle materials that pose a risk of containing so-called mad cow disease, and prohibit their use in human foods, dietary supplements, and cosmetics. SRMs include bovine brain, skull, eyes, trigeminal ganglia, spinal cord, vertebral column with some exceptions, and dorsal root ganglia from cattle 30 months of age and older, plus the tonsils and distal ileum of all cattle.

[CIDRAP Foodborne Disease Scan](#) (third item)

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WELLNESS

Apple unveils CareKit, an open source framework for making health apps

21 March - Today, Apple introduced the open source software framework CareKit, which can be used to develop healthcare apps. Apple plans to release the software in April, and the company said the software is aimed at making things easier for users to track their health and monitor symptoms, medications, and treatment responses and then quickly share that data with medical professionals and loved ones. [Ars Technica](#)

Birth control pills linked to fewer severe knee injuries in teen girls

23 March - Teen girls who take birth control pills may be less likely to seriously injure their knees than those who don't take the pill, a new study suggests. ... The [anterior cruciate ligament (ACL)] connects the top and bottom parts of the knee. Researchers reviewed data from more than 23,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 in the United States. The teens with ACL injuries who were on the birth control pill were less likely to need corrective surgery than girls not taking the pill who had ACL injuries. The girls with the highest rates of ACL surgery were 22 percent less likely to be taking birth control pills than those who didn't have an ACL injury. Experts have theorized that the female hormone estrogen may make women more vulnerable to ACL injuries. ... "Birth control pills help maintain lower and more consistent levels of estrogen, which may prevent periodic ACL weakness," Gray said in a university news release. [Medline Plus](#)

Can a drink a day keep the doctor away?

22 March – [A] new study suggests that much of the evidence in favor of moderate drinking may be shaky at best. Scientists took a closer look at findings from 87 previously published studies on drinking and death from all causes and found all but 13 of these experiments had a critical flaw. Most of the studies compared moderate drinkers – people who had one or two drinks a day – with current abstainers. The problem is the studies didn't account for medical reasons that may have driven abstainers to avoid alcohol, potentially exaggerating the health benefits seen with moderate drinking. After taking this so-called abstainer bias into account, "our study found no net benefits overall," said lead study author Tim Stockwell, director of the University of Victoria's Center for Addictions Research in British Columbia, Canada. [Reuters](#)

Could germ from cat poop trigger rage disorder in people?

23 March - ... A new study suggests that people prone to explosive bouts of rage might be under the influence of toxoplasmosis, an illness caused by a parasite found in cat feces and undercooked meat. Folks diagnosed with intermittent explosive disorder (IED) are more than twice as likely to carry *Toxoplasma gondii*, the parasite that causes toxoplasmosis, said lead researcher Dr. Emil Coccaro. ... Coccaro noted that because this study was not a clinical trial, the results don't establish a direct cause-and-effect link. He also added that not everyone who tests positive for toxoplasmosis will have aggression issues. [UPI](#)

Crash risk soars when truck drivers don't treat sleep apnea: study

21 March - Truck drivers with sleep apnea who don't regularly follow their treatment program are much more likely to crash, a new study finds. ... The research included more

than 1,600 U.S. truck drivers with obstructive sleep apnea and a control group with an equal number of drivers without the condition. Those with sleep apnea were prescribed CPAP, a treatment that keeps the airways open during sleep. ... The rate of serious, preventable crashes was five times higher among truckers with sleep apnea who didn't use their CPAP machine, compared to the control group. The crash rate among drivers with sleep apnea who always or sometimes used their CPAP machine was similar to that of the control group.

[Medline Plus](#)

FDA adds addiction, overdose, death to opioid warning labels

22 March - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced it will now require immediate-release opioid painkillers such as OxyContin and Vicodin to carry enhanced warnings about addiction, overdose and death as a result of misuse or abuse of the drugs. The requirement is the second action a government agency has taken in a week against the growing epidemic of opioid abuse and addiction. The new warnings include advice against suddenly stopping treatment because patients can easily develop a dependence on the drugs, as well as against use of the drugs by pregnant women because of concerns of neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome. [UPI](#)

Hunting the genetic signs of postpartum depression with an iPhone app

21 March - With mothers and medical providers clamoring for answers about postpartum depression, scientists are beginning a major effort to understand the genetic underpinnings of mood disorders that afflict millions of women during and after pregnancy. Researchers led by a University of North Carolina team will use a new iPhone app to recruit women who have had postpartum depression. The goal is to collect about 100,000 DNA samples and compare them with DNA from women who have never experienced depression in hopes of discovering genetic factors that could lead to better prediction, diagnosis and treatment for maternal mental illness. ... The free app, PPD ACT, will be offered in the United States, Australia and Britain, and is likely to be extended to other countries. [The New York Times](#)

Mind-body therapy helps ease low back pain

22 March - Mind-based therapy programs may help ease chronic back pain, new research suggests. Patients who took part in such programs were more likely to have noticeable and lasting improvements in back pain than those who stuck to their usual routines, investigators found. Both of the approaches tested in the study - mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) - can be helpful for people who haven't benefited from other therapies, said lead author Daniel Cherkin, of the Group Health Research Institute in Seattle. [Reuters](#)

Only 2.7 percent of U.S. adults live healthy lifestyle, Oregon State researchers find

22 March - Only 2.7 percent of adults nationwide have all four basic healthy characteristics, a new study found. The report ... examined if adults were successful in four areas that fit typical advice for a "healthy lifestyle"-- moderate exercise, a good diet, not smoking and having a recommended body fat percentage. ... Out of the study group, 2.7 percent had all four characteristics, researchers found. About 16 percent had three, 37 percent had two, 34 percent had one and 11 percent had none. ... Other findings from the study included:

- 71 percent of adults didn't smoke
- 38 percent of adults ate a healthy diet
- 10 percent had a normal body fat percentage
- 46 percent were sufficiently active. [Oregon Live](#)

Paying for kidneys might boost donor rate, study says

23 March - If offered \$50,000, nearly three out of five Americans would part with a kidney, a new study finds. "It appears that American society is ready to accept the concept of paying kidney donors," said lead researcher Dr. Thomas Peters, an emeritus professor of surgery at the University of Florida College of Medicine. ... However, Peters isn't suggesting that a paid market for kidneys start anytime soon, only that the idea be studied to see if it might increase the supply of kidneys. Paying for organs is illegal under the U.S. National Organ Transplant Act. When the law was enacted, "the feeling was that altruism should prevail," Peters said. "Organs should not become a commodity, and the giving was as important as receiving. Laws should be amended or changed, so at least pilot studies regarding this question could be carried out to see if kidney donation would increase," he added. [UPI](#)

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USAFRICOM

Angola: More than 150 killed in Angola yellow fever outbreak

18 March - A yellow fever epidemic has killed 158 people in Angola, with more than 50 deaths occurring last month alone, the World Health Organization officials have said. A WHO representative in the capital, Luanda, said on Friday that the "possibility of spreading to other provinces" was much higher and deaths due to the viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes has been accelerating. "The possibility of spreading out to other provinces or even to the all country is much higher than if it had happened in a rural area," Hernando Agudelo Ospina said. "This is an urban pattern of outbreak of Yellow Fever and it is much more complicated to tackle and deal with." [Al Jazeera](#)

Guinea: Guinea Ebola cluster likely part of known transmission chain

23 March -The World Health Organization (WHO) yesterday filled in details on Guinea's new Ebola flare-up in the southern village of Koropara, noting that initial tests suggest the cases are part of a known transmission chain and not a new introduction from the animal population. The report also highlights the challenge responders have, given that more than 100 of the 816 contacts identified so far are considered high risk. ... The number of probable and confirmed deaths in the Guinea flare-up so far is at five. The first three likely Ebola deaths and a mother and 8-year-old daughter are all from the same family, the WHO said. ... The most recent death involved a high-risk contact, a man who traveled to neighboring Macenta district to see a healer. That case was confirmed after the patient died. The WHO said 50 of the man's contacts have been identified, and more tracking and further case investigation is under way. [CIDRAP](#)

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USCENTCOM

Iraq: Obama intervened over crumbling Iraqi dam as U.S. concern grew

22 March - On Jan. 21, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry met with Iraq's prime minister in Davos, Switzerland, and handed him a personal note from President Barack Obama pleading for urgent action. Obama's confidential message ... was about a potential catastrophe posed by the dire state of the country's largest dam, whose collapse could unleash a flood killing tens of thousands of people and trigger an environmental disaster. ... Obama's decision to send the note was prompted in part by alarming U.S. intelligence reports and a new U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study that found that the dam is even more unstable than believed, U.S. officials said. ... Efforts to repair the dam -- which lies about 30 miles (48 km) northwest of the city of Mosul -- have been handicapped by Iraq's chaotic security situation; political divisions in Baghdad; years of previous warnings that did not come true; and a cultural divide, U.S. and Iraqi officials and analysts said. [Reuters](#)

Pakistan illegal alcohol leaves 24 dead from poisoning

22 March - At least 24 people in southern Pakistan have died from poisoning after drinking illegally-made alcohol, police say. A number of others are in hospital after Monday's incident in Sindh province. At least two of those who died were women. Most of the victims were from the country's Hindu minority, although some were Muslims, reports said. Muslims are forbidden from buying or drinking alcohol in Pakistan - and minorities need a permit to buy liquor. However, many people illegally brew alcohol at home, and there have

been several cases of mass poisonings in the past - in 2014 some 40 people died within a few days as a result of drinking tainted alcohol in Sindh. [BBC News](#)

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia reports 2 more MERS cases in Buraydah area



23 March - Saudi Arabia reported two more MERS-CoV cases today, both of which may be linked to an ongoing outbreak in Buraydah and, if definitively connected to that outbreak, would raise the total to 30 since Mar 3. Also today the World Health Organization (WHO) reported more details on four MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) cases, one of them fatal, reported by Saudi Arabia on Mar 15 and 16. ... [The] WHO said Saudi officials notified it of three more deaths in earlier reported patients. The new cases and deaths lift the WHO's global total to 1,698 cases, at least 609 of them fatal. [CIDRAP](#)

Yemen: Famine threatens half of Yemen – WFP

23 March - Nearly half of Yemen's 22 provinces on the verge of famine as result of the war there and more than 13 million people need food aid, the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP) says. Aid groups have blamed curbs imposed by the Saudi-led coalition on access to Houthi-controlled ports for the crisis and also accuse Houthis of preventing supplies from reaching some areas, including the city of Taiz in the southwest. "From a food security perspective, 10 of Yemen's 22 provinces are classified as emergency, which is one step before famine," Adham Musallam, deputy director of the WFP office in the capital Sanaa, said as the agency launched a food voucher program to help the most needy. [Thomas Reuters Foundation News](#)

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USEUCOM

European Union: Chemical exposure linked to 1.4 billion euros in women's health care costs

22 March - Endocrine-disrupting chemicals may contribute to reproductive health problems experienced by hundreds of thousands of women, costing European Union an estimated €1.4 billion (\$1.5 billion) a year in health care expenditures and lost earning potential. ... The study examined rates of uterine fibroids ... [and] endometriosis. ... Research has linked the development of uterine fibroids and endometriosis to chemicals found in pesticides, cosmetics, toys and food containers. Past studies suggest a byproduct of the pesticide DDT,

a chemical known as DDE, can raise the risk of developing uterine fibroids. Another group of chemicals called phthalates, which are found in plastic products and cosmetics, have been tied to growing risk of endometriosis. DDT and phthalates are known endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). EDCs can contribute to health problems by mimicking, blocking or otherwise interfering with the body's hormones. ... The study is part of a series of economic analyses that found endocrine-disrupting chemical exposure may be costing the European Union upwards of €157 billion (\$173 billion) a year. [EurekAlert!](#)

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USNORTHCOM

U.S. health officials move to ban most powdered surgical gloves

21 March - Federal health officials are moving to ban most surgical gloves made with powder, a feature designed to make them easier to wear, but which actually poses health risks to patients. The Food and Drug Administration said Monday that the powder added to some latex gloves can cause breathing problems, wound inflammation, and scar tissue on internal organs when used during surgery. The agency proposed the ban Monday in a federal filing. ... Most powdered gloves have already been phased out, and only six manufacturers are still registered to make them in the U.S., according to the agency.

[CTV News](#)

U.S.: Heart disease rates decline

21 March - Over the last 40 years, heart disease rates have dropped in the U.S. overall, but the changes varied widely by region, with the highest rates of the disease shifting from the Northeast to the South, researchers say. ... The researchers used data on heart disease deaths among people age 35 and over ... from more than 3,000 counties of the 48 contiguous states. Every county saw a decline in heart disease deaths. ... At the beginning of the study, heart disease deaths were most common in the Northeast through Appalachia and into the Midwest. Coastal North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia also had high rates. ... By 2010, most high-rate counties were still in the eastern half of the country, but in the South, rather than in the North, with some parts of New England becoming pockets with lower death rates. Declines were slowest in counties in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and parts of Texas. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Illegal immigrants get public health care, despite federal policy

24 March - When federal lawmakers wrote the act overhauling the nation's health-care system six years ago, they ruled out any possibility of extending health insurance to illegal

immigrants. Local officials where many of those immigrants live are treating them anyway. A Wall Street Journal survey of the 25 U.S. counties with the largest unauthorized immigrant populations found that 20 of them have programs that pay for the low-income uninsured to have doctor visits, shots, prescription drugs, lab tests and surgeries at local providers. The services usually are inexpensive or free to participants, who must prove they live in the county but are told their immigration status doesn't matter. ... County politicians figure it is cheaper, safer and easier to give basic health services to immigrants who can't get insurance than to treat them only in the county's emergency rooms. [The Wall Street Journal](#)

U.S.: Leveling of tuberculosis incidence — United States, 2013–2015

25 March - ... Preliminary data for 2015 indicate an incidence of 3.0 cases per 100,000 persons, approximately the same incidence as during 2013 and 2014. After 2 decades of declining incidence, progress toward TB elimination in the United States appears to have stalled. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S.: New York City bill to call for free tampons in public restrooms, shelters and jails

21 March - New York City Council members are joining a growing national movement to improve access to feminine products, and this Tuesday will introduce proposals for free tampons and pads in city public restrooms, homeless shelters and correctional facilities. ... [They] will also introduce a resolution calling on the state legislature to stop taxing sanitary products. The state does not tax groceries, prescription drugs or condoms, but it still taxes tampons and sanitary pads. ... Chicago rescinded city taxes on sanitary products earlier this month, California lawmakers are pushing for an end to tampon taxes and Canada scrapped the taxes last year. Efforts to make sanitary products available free in public facilities are underway in Wisconsin and Ohio. [The New York Times](#)

U.S.: Tighter, controversial silica rules aimed at saving workers' lungs

24 March - The Department of Labor is issuing a long-awaited and controversial rule Thursday aimed at better protecting workers from inhaling silica dust. The new rule dramatically reduces the allowed exposure limits for workers in a slew of industries, from construction to manufacturing to fracking. ... Secretary of Labor Tom Perez says the existing rule that limits a worker's exposure to silica dust hasn't been changed since the early 1970s. And even back then, he adds, research showed the exposure limit didn't offer adequate protection. ... He says the current rule for construction sites caps exposure at 250 micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air. "And the science says we need to be at 50," says Perez. "So that's what the final rule will say." That same updated exposure limit will apply to general industry as well, he adds, which will cut the current exposure limit in half. [NPR](#)

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Bangladesh: Disease detectives find a really good reason not to drink date palm wine



22 March - ... In Bangladesh in recent years, there have been repeated mini-outbreaks of a disease called Nipah virus – three people here, four there. Some people develop no symptoms. But in others, the virus can progress from a fever to fatal brain inflammation within a week. A few years ago, epidemiologists figured out that people were likely getting Nipah from drinking raw date palm sap, a sweet drink popular in the winter, when the sap is easy to tap from trees pierced with a spigot. ... After that revelation, the government of Bangladesh launched a don't-drink-sap campaign. ... But 14 cases were recorded last year; eight of the patients died. Researchers were puzzled. ... The answer, it turns out, lies in a fact that the patients weren't sharing with disease detectives. Even though alcohol consumption is restricted in Bangladesh because of Muslim law ... some men drink date palm wine on a regular basis. ... The research group ... found that of the 14 cases, the eight men who died of Nipah virus all drank tari every evening. They got fevers, which progressed sometimes to seizures, confusion and comas before death. The six women, who all survived, had likely caught the virus while caring for the sick men. [NPR](#)

China: Shandong illegal vaccine scandal sparks anger

21 March - Chinese citizens have reacted with anger and alarm at news of a massive illegal vaccine operation uncovered in Shandong province. The illegal vaccine ring involved hundreds of people, and affected 24 provinces and cities, local media said. ... The illegal vaccine ring was said to have been in operation since 2011. The ringleaders, who have been arrested, were allegedly a mother and a daughter who purchased the vaccines from licensed and unlicensed sources, and then sold them on to illegal agents or local disease control and prevention centres for high prices, reported Xinhua state news agency. The \$88m (£61m) worth of vaccines were not adequately refrigerated nor transported in approved conditions. The potentially compromised vaccines could cause disability and death, Xinhua said. Though authorities had known about the ring since April last year, they only made the news public late on Friday when they issued a call demanding that suppliers come forward to help them trace potential victims. [BBC News](#)

Indonesia: Mentally-ill Indonesians locked up and shackled

21 March - People with psychosocial disabilities in Indonesia are often chained or forced into institutions where they face abuse, according to Human Rights Watch. The US-based rights group's report ... revealed that 57,000 people in Indonesia with mental health

conditions have been subjected to "pasung" (shackled and often locked up in a confined space) at least once in their lives. People subjected to pasung have their ankles bound with shackles, rope or wooden stocks and are locked in confined spaces where they eat, sleep, urinate, and defecate. A ban on shackling in Indonesia has been in place since 1977, but Human Rights Watch says about 18,800 are currently subject to the treatment across the country. "Shackling people with mental health conditions is illegal in Indonesia, yet it remains a widespread and brutal practice," said Kriti Sharma, disability rights researcher at Human Rights Watch and author of the report. ... Indonesia struggles with a shortage of psychiatrists; only 800 reportedly practise in Indonesia, a nation with a population of 250 million people. [Al Jazeera](#)

Laos: Vientiane Rescue - the deadly streets of Laos

21 March - ... With the country's economy booming, more people in Laos can afford motorbikes and cars than ever before - and they drive the vehicles at breakneck speed - with no traffic lights or roundabouts to slow them down. The death toll from road accidents in Laos increased by 26 percent last year. Vientiane has arguably the worst road toll per capita in Asia, and one of the worst in the world. For most drivers, volunteer response service Vientiane Rescue is their only hope when tragedy strikes. Set up by French paramedic Sebastian Perret in 2010, Vientiane Rescue fills the gap in a city that severely lacks emergency services. The official ambulances are mainly used to transfer patients between hospitals and they charge patients for their services. So without assistance from volunteers, serious accident victims would be - and often are - left to die on the side of the road. ... Drink-driving is the biggest cause of accidents in Laos. The country is the second biggest consumer of alcohol in Southeast Asia, according to the World Health Organization. [Al Jazeera](#)

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USSOUTHCOM

Guadeloupe: Twelve sepsis deaths noted in Guadeloupe chikungunya outbreak

23 March - Scientists from the Guadeloupe island group, writing in *Emerging Infectious Diseases* yesterday, reported 25 cases of severe sepsis and 12 associated deaths likely attributable to chikungunya infection during a 2014 outbreak. Of 110 non-pregnant adults hospitalized with chikungunya in 2014, 42 had infections resulting in failure of one or more organs or intensive care unit admission. More than half of patients with severe illness (25, or 59.5%) progressed to sepsis or septic shock, and 12 died. Patients with severe infections were more likely to have acute cardiac failure and organ dysfunction, in addition to higher white blood cell counts and higher enzyme levels indicating tissue damage compared with

patients who had less severe illnesses. No cause other than chikungunya infection was identified in the 25 patients who progressed to severe sepsis or septic shock.

[CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

Haiti: Cholera deaths in Haiti could far exceed official count

18 March - Deaths from the cholera epidemic that ravaged Haiti after the 2010 earthquake could be much higher than the 9,200 officially tallied so far because of underreporting during the initial outbreak, a new study suggests. The study, by Doctors Without Borders, found that incomplete surveillance and data collection, overwhelmed health clinics, the rapid spread of the disease and cholera's ability to kill quickly contributed to what appears to have been a drastic understating of the death toll. ... [The study] provided a basis for calculating some new estimates that if applied nationally could multiply the known death toll by roughly a factor of three, at least in the first six months of the epidemic, when it was most intense. ... In some areas, the number of deaths may have been as much as 10 times as high as that reported to the Haitian government, which derived its statistics largely from mortality information supplied by clinics and hospitals. [The New York Times](#)

PAHO reports 1,700 new chikungunya cases in the Americas

22 March - The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) late last week reported 1,693 new cases of chikungunya in the Americas, bringing the 2016 outbreak total to 32,535 confirmed and suspected cases. ... Colombia had the largest increase, with 782 new cases, to bring its total for the year to 8,701. Honduras was next, with 463 new cases and 6,194 total. Ecuador had 187 new cases and 570 for the year, and Venezuela had 116 new cases, raising its 2016 total to 1,866. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

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