NOTICE:
The Army Public Health Weekly Update will not be published next week. Expect the next issue on 3 February 2017.

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Federal hiring freeze could cause problems for managers, veterans

24 January - President Donald Trump's new federal hiring freeze could cause major problems for not only managers at the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense but also thousands of former servicemembers hoping to land government posts. On Monday, in one of his first executive actions in the White House, Trump ordered "a freeze on the hiring of federal civilian employees to be applied across the board in the executive branch." It applies to "all executive departments and agencies regardless of the sources of their operational and programmatic funding, excepting military personnel." ... The order does not revoke any job offers already made by managers, and does contain exceptions for "any positions that it deems necessary to meet national security or public safety responsibilities." ... Veterans looking for work could be among the largest groups affected by the change, since they currently make up about one-third of the federal workforce. Military Times

Mattis picks two Navy rear admirals as top aides

23 January - New Defense Secretary James Mattis picked top aides and made his first phone call to a foreign counterpart Monday as he began his first full week in the Pentagon's top job. Mattis named retired Navy Rear Adm. Kevin Sweeney, who served with him previously at U.S. Central Command, to be his chief of staff. Two-star Navy Rear Adm. Craig Faller, currently the service's chief of legislative affairs, was chosen to serve as Mattis' senior military assistant, said Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman. Military.com

Social media could be powerful suicide prevention tool, Army secretary says

19 January - As an Army officer in Iraq, Daniel Feehan relied on his driver to keep him safe while they traveled on dangerous missions. But once they were back on home soil, Feehan said, he failed to do the same for his driver, Spc. Sergio Betts, when Betts made a call for help ... "We must be prepared ... to intervene before that last post," said Feehan, who now helps direct U.S. military suicide prevention policies. He spoke Wednesday at a Pentagon symposium on suicide prevention and social media. "Call the person, message them back, offer them a helping hand. Just ask if they're OK," he added, choking up. As his last public appearance as secretary of the Army, Eric Fanning hosted the symposium, addressing leaders of suicide prevention groups, researchers and social media experts from Facebook, LinkedIn, Google and Apple. In his remarks, he expressed hope the Army could reduce suicide rates with their help. In the coming weeks, participants in the symposium are expected to offer recommendations to Army senior leaders on how they can use social media to stem suicidal thoughts and acts among Soldiers. Army.mil
Wellness assessment at USASMA reveals common problem: not enough sleep

23 January - When representatives from the Executive Wellness Center assessed Class 67 at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy recently, they found themselves doling out the same advice to many of the sergeants-major-to-be: Get more sleep. Lt. Col. Cyndi McLean was one of three medical professionals who reviewed students’ responses to a questionnaire about healthy habits related to the three elements of the Performance Triad - activity, nutrition and sleep. ... McLean said that not getting enough sleep can be the root of many other performance problems. If Soldiers sleep better, she said, they start to see benefits in other areas, such as improved eating and activity levels and reduced anxiety.

Army.mil

Alexa, Cortana and Siri are about to diagnose your health

23 January - Amazon Echo, Google Home, Siri and the myriad of other "assistants" that are out there are slowly but surely getting smarter and could, one day, be your doctor if researchers ... have their way. According to new research, short voice clips can be used to diagnose a variety of diseases and conditions which means we just might be saving lives and catching diseases way sooner than we are currently. ... Using complex algorithms and machine learning the researchers hope to find vocal patterns that might signal illness and more complex disorders via a five-year study. Researchers ... believe post-traumatic stress disorder and even heart disease could be detected in a few years rather than decades. ... SRI International Marmar (CA, US) is looking at PTSD in veterans and have already picked out 30 characteristics (from 40,000 total features they have identified) with early results showing at 77% accuracy rate of identifying PTSD. Forbes

Blame technology, not longer life spans, for health spending increases

23 January - American life spans are rising, and as they are, health care spending is, too. But longevity is not contributing to the spending increase as much as you might think. ... Older people need more health care, and they spend more. Compared with the working-age population (people 19 to 64 years old), those 65 to 74 spend two times as much; those 75 to 84 spend four times as much; and those 85 and older spend six times as much. ... The real culprit of increased spending? Technology. Every year you age, health care technology changes — usually for the better, but always at higher cost. Technology change is responsible for at least one-third and as much as two-thirds of per capita health care
spending growth. After accounting for changes in income and health care coverage, aging alone can explain only, at most, a few percentage points of spending growth.  

The New York Times

Hepatitis in the Americas: Report reveals the enormous scale of this silent epidemic

23 January - The first report of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) on viral hepatitis reveals the enormous scale of this silent epidemic in the Americas, and advocates an organized response by the countries of the region to prevent, detect and treat those who need it. The new report, "Hepatitis B and C in the Spotlight: A public health response in the Region of the Americas 2016" estimates that about 2.8 million people have chronic hepatitis B virus infection and about 7.2 million have hepatitis C virus. Of these three of every four persons do not know they have the infection. ... Hepatitis B and C are estimated to cause about 125,000 deaths each year, more deaths than tuberculosis and HIV infection combined. The report shows that of the 7.2 million people living with chronic hepatitis C in the region, only 4 %, or 300,000, receive treatment. In addition, an estimated 65,000 people are infected every year with hepatitis C. Outbreak News Today

How reliable are cancer studies?

18 January - In recent years, scientists have been dealing with concerns about a reproducibility crisis—the possibility that many published findings may not actually be true. ... In 2011, Bayer Healthcare said that its in-house scientists could only validate 25 percent of basic studies in cancer and other conditions. ... A year later, Glenn Begley and Lee Ellis from Amgen said that the firm could only confirm the findings in 6 out of 53 landmark cancer papers—just 11 percent. Perhaps, they wrote, that might explain why "our ability to translate cancer research to clinical success has been remarkably low." ... Elizabeth Iorns ... contacted the [Center for Open Science] and together, they launched the Reproducibility Project: Cancer Biology—an initiative that used the Science Exchange labs to replicate key results from the 50 most cited papers in cancer biology, published between 2010 and 2012. ... The results from the first five of these replication attempts were published today—and they offer no clean answers. Two of them largely (but not entirely) confirmed the conclusions of the original studies. One failed to do so. And two were inconclusive for technical reasons. The Atlantic

Human-pig 'chimera embryos' detailed

26 January - Embryos that are less than 0.001% human - and the rest pig - have been made and analysed by scientists. It is the first proof chimeras - named after the mythical lion-goat-serpent monster - can be made by combining material from humans and animals. However, the scientific report in the journal Cell shows the process is challenging and the aim of growing human organs in animals is distant. ... The process appears very inefficient - of the 2,075 embryos implanted only 186 continued to develop up to the 28-day stage. But crucially there were signs that human cells were functioning - albeit as a tiny fraction of the
New medical worry: deadly fungal infection that resists treatment

24 January - You’ve probably heard of antibiotic resistance — germs that can resist the drugs designed to wipe them out. Now there’s a new kind of resistance to worry about — fungal infections that are resistant to treatment. The fungal infection in question is *Candida auris*, which can cause infections in the mouth, genitals, ears, wounds or, worst of all, the bloodstream. While other species of *Candida* can lead to the same kinds of infections, *Candida auris* is getting worldwide attention because, according to a study in the February 2017 journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, some cases have proven to be resistant to all three classes of drugs available to treat fungal infections. The first reported case was in Japan in 2009 but it has now been found on five continents. NPR

Pneumonia vaccine underperforms among older adults

24 January - A new study published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases showed that the 23-strain pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV23) underperformed among adults ages 65 and older. The vaccine was only 27.4% effective in protecting against all pneumococcal pneumonia, 33.5% effective against PPV23 serotypes, and a non-significant 2% effective against non-PPV23 serotypes. Although the differences were not significant, the authors noted that adults under the age of 75 and woman, as well as those diagnosed as having lobar pneumonia or healthcare-associated pneumonia, were more likely to be protected by PPV23. CIDRAP News Scan (sixth item)

Scientists want to use a genetically modified malaria parasite as a vaccine against the disease

22 January - ... [Stefan Kappe, director of Translational Science at the Center for Infectious Disease Research in Seattle] is the principal investigator on a promising new test pitting the malaria parasite against itself — “fighting fire with fire,” as he explains. By knocking out three genes in *Plasmodium falciparum*, his team created a weakened version of the parasite that can’t replicate in the body to pass on malaria, but still stimulates a human immune response. Kappe says that in the first human trial, 10 volunteers (including himself) each received about 200 mosquito bites, delivering a total of about 100,000–200,000 of the genetically modified parasites. No one became ill. ... Now, the next step for Kappe’s team is to test the vaccine’s efficacy, by repeatedly immunizing volunteers and then exposing them to “real,” or infectious malaria parasites, in a controlled environment. If the volunteers don’t develop malaria, it means that the vaccine works. PRI

Study linking Roundup to serious disease fuels debate

22 January - British scientists say they have conducted an unprecedented, long-term study showing a link between Roundup - one of the most widely used herbicides in the world -
and severe liver damage in test rats. The research sparked further debate in the international scientific community over the potential health hazards to people caused by exposure to the well-known weed killer. Scientists said their tests used cutting-edge technology to demonstrate that "extremely low doses" of the herbicide administered to rats through their drinking water had caused "non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)" over a two-year period. NAFLD can lead to more serious liver disease such as cirrhosis, and increases the risk of other illnesses including diabetes, heart attacks and strokes. Al Jazeera

Zika case counts in the US

This update from the CDC Arboviral Disease Branch includes provisional data reported to ArboNET for January 01, 2015 – January 18, 2017. CDC

US States
- Locally acquired mosquito-borne cases reported: 217
- Travel-associated cases reported: 4,682
- Laboratory acquired cases reported: 1
- Total: 4,900
  - Sexually transmitted: 38
  - Guillain-Barré syndrome: 13

US Territories
- Locally acquired cases reported: 35,392
- Travel-associated cases reported: 135
- Total: 35,527*
  - Guillain-Barré syndrome: 51

*Sexually transmitted cases are not reported for US territories because with local transmission of Zika virus it is not possible to determine whether infection occurred due to mosquito-borne or sexual transmission.

INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 3:
- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity decreased to minimal to moderate for most of the country.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity was decreased to minimal to moderate for EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity decreased to minimal to low across PACOM.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity ranged from minimal to low for locations with available data in CENTCOM and AFRICOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity was minimal in Honduras this week based on DMSS
APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 14 January 2017 (Week 2):
In the general population, the weekly rates of influenza-like illness (ILI) activity are higher this flu season compared to the 2015-2016 flu season. However, ILI activity trends this season are similar to trends identified during the previous season.

- **ILI Activity:** Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 2 were 2% lower than the same week last year.
- **Influenza cases:** One hospitalized influenza-associated case was reported to APHC through DRSi in week 2; the case was an unvaccinated AD Service Member.
- **Viral specimens:** During week 2, 393 of 1426 (28%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-A reported most (38.6%) of the influenza A-positive specimens, followed by RHC-C (27.7%), RHC-P (25.4%), RHC-E (8%), and CENTCOM (0.4%).

As China's H7N9 total climbs, WHO's Chan warns of threat

23 January - China's surge of H7N9 avian influenza cases is growing, with 111 cases already reported in the first half of January, topping December's sudden and steep rise and prompting a global call from the World Health Organization's (WHO's) top official to keep a close watch on outbreaks in birds and to report human cases promptly. In a speech today before the WHO executive board, Director-General Margaret Chan, MD, MPH, said the world is better prepared for the next influenza pandemic, "but not at all well enough." The WHO is on high alert because of the rapidly expanding scope of the outbreaks and the number of strains, such as highly pathogenic H5N8 and H5N6, that are co-circulating, she said.

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

During week 2 (January 8-14, 2017), influenza activity increased in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus subtype reported by public health laboratories during week 2 was influenza A (H3). 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 the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.
- **Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths:** Two influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.
ECDC: Flu News Europe
Week 2/2017 (9 - 15 January 2017)

- Influenza activity remained widespread across the region with high or very high intensity in 8 out of 44 reporting countries or regions and medium intensity in 26 countries.
- The proportion of influenza virus detections among sentinel surveillance specimens was 46%, a slight decline from 52% in the previous week.
- The great majority of influenza viruses detected were type A (97%) and, of those subtyped, 99% were A(H3N2).
- Most of the hospitalized laboratory-confirmed cases reported have occurred in people aged 65 years or more.
- Excess all-cause mortality among the elderly has been observed in the past 1 to 2 months in most of the 18 countries that take part in EuroMOMO.

European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update
For 2017 Week 2 (through 14 January 2017)

- Influenza: No new cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at MCRD San Diego. Naval Health Research Center

USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program
During 1 - 14 January 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 1 & 2), a total of 310 specimens were collected from 51 locations. Results were finalized for 233 specimens from 45 locations. During Week 1, 46 influenza A(H3N2) and three influenza B viruses were identified. During Week 2, 42 influenza A(H3N2) and three influenza B viruses were identified. Approximately 33% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 1. Approximately 30% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 2. The influenza percent positive for the season is approximately 18%.

US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

WHO: Influenza Update
23 January - Influenza activity in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere continued to increase, with many countries especially in East Asia and Europe having passed their seasonal threshold early in comparison with previous years. Worldwide, influenza A(H3N2) virus was predominant. The majority of influenza viruses characterized so far was similar antigenically to the reference viruses contained in vaccines for use in the 2016-2017 northern hemisphere influenza season. All tested viruses collected recently for antiviral sensitivity were susceptible to the neuraminidase inhibitor antiviral medications. WHO
VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Investigation of Seoul virus outbreak associated with home-based, rat-breeding facilities in Wisconsin and Illinois

24 January - CDC and health officials from Wisconsin and Illinois are conducting an investigation of Seoul virus infections among pet rats and persons exposed to rats at rat-breeding facilities in Wisconsin and Illinois. Seoul virus is a member of the hantavirus group of rodent-borne viruses. Trace-back and trace-out investigations of possibly infected rodents have identified distribution chains in other states that may require additional investigations. People who become infected with this virus often exhibit relatively mild or no symptoms, but some will develop a form of hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS) with death in approximately 1–2% of HFRS cases. Although serologic studies have indicated the presence of Seoul virus in wild rats in the United States, this is the first known outbreak associated with pet rats in the United States. CDC

FDA and EPA release fish consumption advice

23 January - The FDA and EPA have issued advice about eating fish, geared toward pregnant women, women of child-bearing age, breastfeeding mothers, and parents of young children. The issue regarding fish consumption is mercury content. A reference chart sorts 62 types of fish into three categories: "Best choices" you can eat two to three times a week; "good choices" that you can eat once a week, and "fish to avoid." Fish in the "best choices" category include almost 90% of the fish eaten in this country. FDA conducted an analysis of fish consumption data and found that 50% of pregnant women surveyed ate less than 2 ounces a week. Food Poisoning Bulletin

FDA issues new proposed rule on sprout safety

23 February - On Jan 19 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed new standards and rules to limit the contamination of sprouts, one of the most common sources of foodborne disease. According to the FDA, sprouts are grown and manufactured in conditions that allow bacteria to flourish. Between 1996 and July 2016 there were 46 reported outbreaks associated with sprouts in the United States, accounting for 2,474 illnesses, 187 hospitalizations, and 3 deaths. The new proposed safety rule requires that sprout growers test irrigation water for pathogens, monitor for Listeria, and take corrective actions when needed, among other measures. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)

The horrifying way some drug addicts are now getting their fix

23 January - It was the third time Heather Pereira had taken her golden retriever to the same neighborhood animal clinic in Kentucky. The first was ... when Pereira took the injured
4-year-old dog to the Elizabethtown Animal Hospital ... After the veterinarian sewed up a cut, Pereira requested Tramadol, a drug used to treat pain in both animals and humans. ... Three days later, she returned — saying her child had flushed the pills down the toilet. So the vet gave her more. But it was this third time, on Dec. 4, 2014, that the veterinarian became suspitions. The dog's old cut had not yet completely healed and the animal was back with another. ... “The cut looked sharp and clean — not like the kind in nature when a dog is cut on a fence or in a fight.” Police said Pereira had been intentionally wounding her dog and “vet shopping.” ... Although these cases appear uncommon, authorities say they underscore the nation's widespread opioid epidemic. ... At the same time, some veterinarians say it's a relatively small problem — arguing that publicizing it will only give drug addicts the idea to do it, and that formally regulating it will only put more of a burden on the vets. The Washington Post

wellness

1 in 4 U.S. men have cancer-linked HPV genital infections

19 January - The first national estimate suggests that nearly half of U.S. men have genital infections caused by a sexually transmitted virus and that 1 in 4 has strains linked with several cancers. ... The new estimate comes from an analysis of a 2013-14 national health survey; nearly 2,000 men aged 18 to 59 were tested for HPV. ... The researchers say it's the first published estimate for genital HPV infections in men. The 45 percent rate is higher than previously reported rates for women, said Dr. Jasmine Han, the lead author and a cancer specialist at Womack Army Medical Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. AP

Federal program cuts disparities in HIV/AIDS care

24 January - When Gina Brown was diagnosed with HIV in 1994, she considered it a death sentence, but nearly 23 years later, she's living a full life in New Orleans, thanks largely to the federally funded Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program. In 2014, the safety-net program provided drugs, medical care and support services to more than 268,000 people in the U.S. living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections. Now a study shows that in 82 percent of them, including Brown, HIV is no longer detectable in their blood – a state known as "viral suppression." Those who are virally suppressed take antiretroviral medications that allow them to expect to live a nearly average lifespan. In addition, the drugs can virtually eliminate the possibility of transmitting the virus to others. The number of Ryan White program participants who achieved viral suppression rose 12 percent from 2010 until 2014, researchers found. Reuters
Is your job to blame for your asthma?

24 January - ... Recently, the CDC looked at asthma rates among employed adults by industry and occupation in 21 states, from California to New York. The health care and social service industry had the highest proportion of workers reporting they had asthma (10 percent). Retail trade, which ranges from car dealers to clothing stores, and education, which includes teachers and other staff in the field, also ranked among industries with the highest asthma prevalence at about 9 percent each. ... [T]he research had a number of limitations. For example, participants self-reported that they had asthma ... and researchers didn’t go so far as to prove asthma was work-related. ... But based on survey results from the research, “as many as 2.7 million U.S. workers might have asthma caused by or exacerbated by workplace conditions.” ... "Each of the industries and occupations identified in this report is associated with a specific set of existing and emerging workplace exposures," the researchers wrote. Those range from irritant chemicals to emotional stress, temperature and physical exertion associated with work-related asthma.

U.S. News and World Report

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USAFRICOM

Africa: The bad habits that are making Africans sick

20 January - Healthcare in Africa has long focused on communicable diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and Ebola, as the region lurches from one epidemic to another. Increased development has led to better responses to these diseases, and an improved lifestyle for many on the continent. ... Africans are living longer, but also taking up poor habits that threaten our health. The World Health Organization’s Report on the Status of Major Health Risk Factors for Noncommunicable Diseases showed a series of worrying trends. Most African adults were found to have at least one of the five major risk factors for noncommunicable diseases: smoking, bad diet, lack of exercise, excess weight and high blood pressure. At least a quarter of adults were observed to have at least three of these five combined risk factors. Quartz

Chad: Hepatitis E

24 January - From 1 September 2016 until 13 January 2017, a total of 693 cases including 11 deaths of acute jaundice syndrome (AJS) have been reported from Am Timan, Chad. Of the 50 patients with AJS who were hospitalized, 48 were tested for Hepatitis E using the Hepatitis E virus rapid diagnostic test (HEV RDT) and 27 (56.3%) tested positive. ... Since September 2016, 11 deaths have been reported among the hospitalized cases but the total case fatality might be underestimated. As of 13 January 2017, 16 pregnant women
presenting with AJS have been hospitalized and tested for Hepatitis E, 12 (75%) of them tested positive using the HEV RDT. Of the pregnant women presenting with AJS, four have reportedly died (three had tested positive for Hepatitis E). WHO

Nigeria: Malnutrition wiping out children in Northern Nigeria, aid workers say

23 January - Starvation in northern Nigeria’s Borno State is so bad that a whole slice of the population — children under 5 — appears to have died, aid agencies say. As the Nigerian army has driven the terrorist group Boko Haram out of the area, about two million people have been displaced. Many are living in more than 100 refugee camps. Doctors Without Borders, which has been in Borno State since 2014, reported in November that it was seeing hardly any children under age 5 at its clinics, hospitals and feeding centers. “There are almost always small children buzzing around the camps,” Dr. Joanne Liu, the agency’s president, and Dr. Natalie Roberts, an emergency operations manager, wrote then. “We saw only older brothers and sisters. No toddlers straddling their big sisters’ hips, no babies strapped to their mothers’ backs.” Measles, diarrhea, pneumonia and malaria — all of which are worsened when starvation weakens immune systems — were taking a huge toll on infants and toddlers, they said. The New York Times

Sierra Leone: Where are Sierra Leone's missing Ebola millions?

23 January - Nearly three years after Ebola hit Sierra Leone, millions of dollars in funds raised to fight the deadly virus have still not been accounted for. ... The outbreak, which started in Guinea in December 2013, engulfed Sierra Leone, killing nearly 4,000 people. The dead included more than 200 health workers, of whom more than 50 worked at the Kenema hospital. ... An internal audit of the first six months of the outbreak said at least $14m (£11m) had been misappropriated or was unaccounted for. The audit also said that no proof existed that payments of high-risk health workers' hazard allowances, amounting to more than $4m, had been paid. BBC News

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Saudi Arabia: Three new MERS cases in Saudi Arabia, 2 linked to camels

23 January - Over the weekend and through today, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health (MOH) reported three new cases of MERS-CoV, two of which were linked to camel exposure. ... The new cases raise Saudi Arabia's MERS-CoV total to 1,543, including 641 deaths. Nine
Syria: Doctors and nurses of Aleppo wonder what to do next

22 January - ... When forces supporting Syrian President Bashar Assad moved in to take control of [Aleppo] last month, Abu Hussam was among the last of the civilians evacuated from the city. He couldn't stay, because the Syrian government has persecuted medical staff and their families for treating rebels. ... Like many of the other doctors and nurses who risked their own lives to help their city's sick and wounded, he's now out of a job. ... [M]any doctors and nurses who've fled Aleppo now feel they have no purpose, says Dr. A.M., — a Detroit-based intensive care specialist with the Syrian American Medical Society, a humanitarian organization that provides relief services and funds clinics all over Syria. ... SAMS is now working on building two new hospitals at the border between Syria and Turkey, says M. — where Aleppo's civilian refugees can get treatment, and medical workers. ... can find employment. Other humanitarian groups, including the Union of Medical Care and Relief, have also offered jobs to doctors and nurses fleeing Aleppo. NPR

Israel/Syria: Under cover of night, Syrian wounded seek help from enemy Israel

243 January - It happens nearly every night. After dark, the Syrian wounded come to known locations on the Israel-Syria front in the Golan Heights, driven by desperation to seek help from an enemy army. Israeli soldiers on lookout or patrol spot them waiting by the fence and whisk them away to a rear position where army medics soon arrive, according to army officials operating in the area that was seized by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war. Israel refuses to accept refugees fleeing the nearly six-year conflict in Syria, a country with which it remains technically at war. But it has allowed in more than 2,600 Syrians for medical care. ... The Israeli army helped facilitate access to the hospital, perhaps concerned to counter the negative image it has in most of the Arab world. Reuters

United Kingdom: 'Filthy air' prompts 'very high' pollution alert for London

23 January - A "very high" air pollution warning has been issued for London for the first time under a new alert system. Warnings are being issued at bus stops, roadside signs and Tube stations under the new system set up by London Mayor Sadiq Khan. The rise has been attributed to cold, calm and settled weather, meaning winds are not dispersing local...
pollutants. The mayor said “the shameful state of London’s toxic air” meant he had to trigger the alert. “This is the highest level of alert and everyone - from the most vulnerable to the physically fit - may need to take precautions to protect themselves from the filthy air,” he said. A spike in pollution on Sunday was the highest level recorded since April 2011.

BBC News

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USNORTHCOM

Mexico: For the first time, *Aedes* discovered in Mexico City

23 January - A new study ... describes the discovery of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, the vector that transmits Zika virus as well as dengue and chikungunya, in Mexico City. Previously, Mexico’s most populated city was considered too “high and dry” for the mosquito. ... In September 2015, during a routine entomological survey of the city, *Aedes* larvae were collected at the Casa del Peregrino (Catholic Pilgrim House) and a suburban train stop in the northern part of the city. ... The authors suggest that climate change and rapid urbanization may be forcing the vectors to move northward and potentially spread diseases among populations with no local immunity. *CIDRAP News Scan* (second item)

U.S.: ANSI highlights standards' role in safe blood donations

25 January - Citing the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute, an ANSI-accredited standards-developing organization that has published standards for blood collection and laboratory testing, the American National Standards Institute noted this week that it is national blood donor month and the American Red Cross has issued an emergency call for blood and platelet donations due to a severe winter blood shortage.

*Occupational Health & Safety*

U.S.: Cervical cancer death rates higher among older and black women

23 January - A woman's risk of dying of cervical cancer is higher than long believed, particularly among older and black women, new ... research suggests. The researchers found that black women in the United States are dying from cervical cancer at a rate 77 percent higher than previously thought while white women are dying at a rate 47 percent higher. The new figures reflect a change in how mortality rates are calculated. By excluding women who have had hysterectomies, ... the researchers say these data paint a more accurate picture of who is getting cervical cancer. ... Meanwhile, many of those who are dying are
over the age of 65, a cutoff point where guidelines no longer recommend women with cervixes be regularly screened for cervical cancer. EurekAlert!

U.S.: Federal agencies ordered to restrict their communications

24 January - Trump administration officials instructed employees at multiple agencies in recent days to cease communicating with the public through news releases, official social media accounts and correspondence, raising concerns that federal employees will be able to convey only information that supports the new president’s agenda. The new limits on public communications appear to be targeting agencies that are charged with overseeing environmental and scientific policy, prompting criticism from officials within the agencies and from outside groups focused on climate change. The Environmental Protection Agency as well as the Agriculture and Interior departments now have formal policies restricting what they should convey to the public about their work. The Washington Post

U.S.: Rear Admiral with a lot of experience now acting CDC director

23 January - Dr. Anne Schuchat took over at CDC as acting director on Friday. She holds the rank of Rear Admiral in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Services. Schuchat has worked in West Africa on meningitis, pneumonia and Ebola vaccine trials and on surveillance and prevention projects in South Africa. In addition, Schuchat served as Chief Health Officer for CDC’s 2009 H1N1 pandemic influenza response; led the CDC team responding to the SARS outbreak in Beijing in 2003; and supported the Washington D.C. field team during the 2001 bio-terrorist anthrax response. ... Frieden has left his successor with the thorny problem of what to do if $890 million in annual funding from the Affordable Health Care Act is repealed. The AHC is the source of a preventive fund that, if cut, will leave a large hole in CDC’s budget. Food Safety News

U.S.: Republican plan to replace Obamacare would turn Medicaid over to states

22 January - Republicans plan to turn control of Medicaid over to the states as part of their replacement for the Affordable Care Act, according to an adviser to President Donald Trump. Kellyanne Conway [said] that the health care law that will replace Obamacare will turn Medicaid — a joint state-federal health insurance program for the poor — into a block grant program. The change would mean the federal government would give money to the states to implement Medicaid as they see fit. ... Medicaid is now funded by the federal government and states together and it has an open-ended funding stream, meaning it pays for all health costs to which its beneficiaries are entitled under the law. ... [M]any health policy analysts say that block grants could lead to reductions in care. NPR
U.S.: Study finds premature death rates diverge in the United States by race and ethnicity

26 January - Premature death rates have declined in the United States among Hispanics, blacks, and Asian/Pacific Islanders (APIs) -- in line with trends in Canada and the United Kingdom -- but increased among whites and American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs), according to a comprehensive study of premature death rates for the entire U.S. population from 1999 to 2014. ... Declining rates of premature death (i.e., deaths among 25- to 64-year-olds) among Hispanics, blacks, and APIs were due mainly to fewer deaths from cancer, heart disease, and HIV over the time period of the study. The decline reflects successes in public health efforts to reduce tobacco use and medical advances to improve diagnosis and treatment. Whites also experienced fewer premature deaths from cancer and, for most ages, fewer deaths from heart disease over the study period. Despite these substantial improvements, overall premature death rates still remained higher for black men and women than for whites. NIH

U.S.: The risk of death from cancer may depend on where you live

24 January - Cancer death rates are surging in some regions of the U.S. even as fatalities steadily decline nationwide, a new study suggests. Overall, the U.S. death rate from cancer has dropped about 20 percent from 1980 to 2014, the study found. Cancer fatalities now account for about 192 deaths for every 100,000 people in the U.S., down from 240 per 100,000 at the start of the study period. But in some parts of the country where poverty, obesity and smoking are more common, rates of death from cancer are going up. "Known cancer risk factors – smoking, diet, and obesity, among others – combined with poor prevention programs may increase cancer cases," said senior study author Dr. Christopher Murray. Reuters

U.S.: Trump reverses abortion-related U.S. policy, bans funding to international health groups

23 January - Yet again, a rule is back in effect to block U.S. international family-planning assistance to organizations that use other money to discuss or pay for abortions in other countries. President Trump on Monday reversed the Obama administration’s 2009 decision that let the money flow. The decision means nonprofits abroad will have to end patient counseling in which abortion is mentioned or forgo U.S. dollars. The rule ... was first instituted by President Ronald Reagan during a conference in Mexico City in 1984. Its imposition and absence have toggled back and forth each time a different party has assumed power in the White House. The Washington Post
U.S.: U.S. storms - at least 19 dead in Georgia and Mississippi

23 January - Severe weather has killed at least 19 people in the US South and injured many more, emergency officials say. Weather officials warn of high winds, rain and flash flooding as the weather system now moves up the east coast. Four people were killed in Mississippi and 15 in Georgia during the weekend’s tornadoes and thunderstorms. President Trump has pledged federal assistance to the three states that have been most-affected by the storms. ... Most of the deaths occurred in Cook County, when a mobile home park was apparently struck by a tornado. BBC News

China: China birth rate up after one-child rule change

23 January - Birth rates in China rose to their highest level since 2000 last year, despite a fall in the number of women of childbearing age, say officials. The increase follows the relaxation of China's strict one-child policy a year ago. There were 17.86 million births in 2016, a 7.9% increase on 2015, according to National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) statistics. More than 45% of the babies born in 2016 had one or more older siblings. "While the total number of women of childbearing age fell by five million, the number of births increased significantly, showing that the family planning policy adjustments were extremely timely and extremely effective," said the NHFPC’s Yang Wenzhuang. He said that by 2020, there were expected to be between 17 and 20 million births every year. BBC News

China: China wakes up to its mental-health problems

28 January - ... Attitudes are beginning to change and China is waking up to the prevalence of mental illness. Outpatient visits increased by more than 10% every year between 2007 and 2012. Use of antidepressants is rising fast. Young, educated urbanites are increasingly using the internet to seek help privately for their mental-health problems. The government is also making a greater effort. In 2004 it launched a programme aimed at increasing the number of community mental-health facilities. ... Some provinces now give free medicine to people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and other conditions. In 2012, after decades of deliberation, China passed its first mental-health law. The bill called for yet more facilities, an increase in their staff and efforts to raise awareness of the issue. ... But change is slow, and the rapid transformation of Chinese society is making it all the more difficult for many
to get the care they need. The migration of tens of millions of people into cities has broken up families and left many sufferers undiagnosed or with no one to turn to; people often resist seeking help because they are too embarrassed. As incomes have risen, so too has alcoholism, but fewer than 2% of addicts ever seek treatment because very few Chinese consider it an illness. The Atlantic

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Brazil: Yellow fever outbreak kills 40 in Brazil

25 January - Brazilian public health officials are working to stop an outbreak of yellow fever that has killed at least 40 people in Brazil from becoming an epidemic, urging people to seek vaccinations in nine of the country's 26 states. The Health Minister said on Tuesday that 70 cases of the fever and 40 deaths have been confirmed in the outbreak centered in rural areas of the state of Minas Gerais, while another 47 deaths and 368 suspect cases are under investigation. That is up from just seven cases last year and the highest number since 2003. ... Health officials have distributed 4.9 million yellow fever vaccines since the start of the year. In states where inoculation is recommended, Brazilians rushed to get a shot and public health centers ran out of vaccines. ... Brazil has never managed to entirely eradicate rural yellow fever, but it has not registered cases of the disease in urban areas since 1942.

Reuters

Chile: Chile battles devastating wildfires as international help pours in

25 January - The worst wildfires in Chile's modern history are ravaging wide swaths of the country's central-south regions, as a massive Boeing 747-400 Super Tanker arrived on Wednesday on loan from the United States to help extinguish the blazes. "We have never seen something of this size, never in Chile's history. And the truth is the (firefighting) forces are doing everything that is humanly possible and will continue to do so until the fires are contained and controlled," President Michelle Bachelet said, as she visited the hard-hit Maule region. Forest fires are a regular feature of Chile's hot, arid summers, but a nearly decade-long drought combined with historically high temperatures have created tinder-dry conditions. International help from France, the United States, Peru and Mexico has been pouring into Chile as the fires swept through forested hills and into neighboring towns, scorching homes, industry and the region's world-renowned vineyards. The country last week declared a state of emergency. As of Wednesday, 85 separate fires had been recorded, covering some 190,000 hectares (469,500 acres) - more than twice the area of
Processed foods drive surge in obesity rates in Latin America and Caribbean – UN-backed report

19 January - Obesity and overweight are on the rise throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and are prevalent particularly among women and children, according to a new United Nations-backed report. Nearly 360 million people, or 58 per cent of the inhabitants of the region, are overweight with the highest rates observed in the Bahamas at 69 per cent, Mexico at 64 per cent and Chile at 63 per cent. ... Economic growth, increased urbanization, higher average incomes and the integration of the region into international markets have reduced the consumption of traditional preparations and increased consumption of ultra-processed products. UN News Centre