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Brazil: Yellow fever case confirmed in rural Brazil
Fact Sheet: Management of P-Listed Pharmaceutical Containers

Pharmaceuticals that are on the acute hazardous waste (P-list) list include pill bottles that have held pharmaceuticals such as warfarin at concentrations greater than 0.3%; nitroprusside; blister packs and wrappers that held nicotine gum; nicotine patches and lozenges, and containers such as paper/plastic dispensing cups that were used to administer an acute P-listed pharmaceutical to a patient in a healthcare facility.

Satellite accumulation sites/points must be established in wards/pharmacies/community clinics/wellness centers in which these pharmaceuticals are dispensed in order to collect containers.

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U.S. MILITARY

Auditors: Firefighting chemicals forced water-system shutdowns or fixes at 11 DoD installations

20 October - Defense officials found elevated levels of chemicals used in firefighting foam in the drinking water at 11 U.S. military installations, government auditors reported, leading to the shuttering of some water sources and the installation of treatment systems in others. ... A company that operates drinking water systems at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, shuttered two wells that contain the chemicals and plans to install a treatment system before bringing those wells back into service. GAO auditors interviewed service and installation officials about the current and future use of the firefighting foam, and reviewed Defense Department data on testing and cleanup efforts. They also visited seven installations. The chemicals in question are part of firefighting foam that’s used by DoD and civilian airports: perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS, and perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA. Military Times

Sex scandals are rife in the U.S. military, investigation finds

25 October - U.S. military investigators have recorded hundreds of serious misconduct cases in the past four years, many of them sex scandals, according to a new investigation. More than 500 cases among senior military staff, including admirals and generals, have been documented, USA Today reported late Tuesday. The conclusion of investigations and the punishments handed out are often kept closely guarded, according to the investigation, even in the case of public figures. ... Former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel created an office in 2014 to investigate serious misconduct in the military, but it was closed just two years later, without providing any concrete conclusions about the extent of the problem in the military. Newsweek

Use of ICD-10 code A51.31 (condyloma latum) for identifying cases of secondary syphilis

September 2017 - ... Initial examination of the incidence of primary and secondary syphilis revealed that, although annual incidence rates had risen steadily from 2007 (0.9 cases per 10,000 person-years [p-yrs]) to 2014 (2.0 cases per 10,000 p-yrs), the rates for 2015 and 2016 were dramatically higher (4.1 and 8.4 cases per 10,000 p-yrs, respectively). Exploration of the factors associated with these dramatic increases revealed that 47% and 66% of cases of primary and secondary syphilis in 2015 and 2016 were associated with the ICD-10 code (A51.31) for condyloma latum. Because the diagnosis of condyloma latum is unlikely to be associated with two-thirds of all cases of early syphilis, and because the ICD-10 coding system went into effect on 1 October 2015, the possibility that use of the new code might have introduced a systematic error in the counting of cases was examined. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report
U.S. Military non-medical counseling programs demonstrate benefits for participants

23 October - The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) provides short-term, confidential, solution-focused counseling for personal and family issues that do not require treatment through the military health system. These services, called non-medical counseling within DoD, address a breadth of problems, such as stress management, relationship tensions, grief, and deployment-related separation and reintegration. RAND evaluated whether non-medical counseling provided through the Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC) and Military OneSource programs was beneficial to participants and whether the benefits differed by problem type or client characteristics. The results from this study, though not causal, suggest that the programs are largely effective. The small but important proportion of participants who did not report improvement with counseling suggests that the program would benefit from providing additional support, guidance, and training for counselors, particularly for child-related concerns. Rand Corporation

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GLOBAL

Ebola’s legacy: Children with cataracts

19 October - ... Cataracts usually afflict the old, not the young, but doctors have been shocked to find them in Ebola survivors as young as 5. And for reasons that no one understands, some of those children have the toughest, thickest cataracts that eye surgeons have encountered, along with scarring deep inside the eye. Before the Ebola epidemic in West Africa from 2013 to 2016, doctors did not realize how much damage the disease could leave in its wake, because previous outbreaks were small and survivors few. Eye disease, with the specter of blindness, has become a dreaded complication. There are about 17,000 Ebola survivors in West Africa, and researchers estimate that 20 percent of them have had a type of severe inflammation inside the eye, uveitis. It can cause blindness, but even if it resolves and sight returns, cataracts can quickly follow. Usually, just one eye is affected. The New York Times

Genomic data may help reveal hidden MRSA outbreaks

25 October - A study today by researchers in the United Kingdom illustrates how genomic surveillance can shed light on the ways a common superbug can spread, often unnoticed, through hospitals and the community. ... [T]he researchers used genomic sequencing data to identify clusters of people in the east of England who were carrying or infected with methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), and followed those patients over the course of a year. When they combined the genomic information with epidemiologic data
that showed where those MRSA carriers may have come into contact with one another, the results revealed an extensive series of small outbreaks in hospital wards, doctors’ offices, and households that would otherwise have gone unrecognized. CIDRAP

**In memory training smackdown, one method dominates**

23 October - ... A comparison of the two most common training methods scientists use to improve memory and attention found that one was twice as effective as the other. The more effective method also changed brain activity in a part of the brain involved in high-level thinking. But neither method made anyone smarter, says Kara Blacker, the study’s lead author and a researcher at The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine in Bethesda, Md. ... One group did something called a “complex span” test, which involves remembering the location of an item despite distractions. A second group trained with something called the dual n-back test. ... And the n-back training was clearly more effective than complex span training. People who used it showed a 30 percent improvement in working memory, nearly twice as much as people who did complex span training. NPR

**Out of the Syrian crisis, a data revolution takes shape**

25 October - ... Whenever war, hurricanes or other disasters ravage part of the globe, one of the biggest problems for aid organizations is a lack of reliable data. People die because front-line responders don’t have the information they need to act efficiently. Doctors and epidemiologists plod along with paper surveys and rigid databases in crisis situations. ... Three years ago, one frustrated first-responder decided to do something about it. The result is an innovative piece of software called the Dharma Platform, which almost anyone can use to rapidly collect information and share, analyse and visualize it so that they can act quickly. And although public-health veterans tend to be sceptical of technological fixes, Dharma is winning fans. MSF and other organizations now use it in 22 countries. Nature

**Progress toward regional measles elimination — worldwide, 2000–2016**

27 October - For the first time, annual estimated measles deaths were fewer than 100,000, in 2016. This achievement follows an increase in the number of countries providing the second dose of measles-containing vaccine (MCV2) nationally through routine immunization services to 164 (85%) of 194 countries, and the vaccination of approximately 119 million persons against measles during supplementary immunization activities in 2016. During 2000–2016, annual reported measles incidence decreased 87%, from 145 to 19 cases per million persons, annual estimated measles deaths decreased 84%, from 550,100 to 89,780, and an estimated 20.4 million deaths were prevented. However, the 2015 measles elimination milestones have not yet been met, and only one World Health Organization region has been verified as having eliminated measles. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report
Epi-Tech Training

The next Epi-Tech Training will be held Tuesday, 30 January 2018, in conjunction with the US Navy & Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) and the US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine (USAFSAM).

Registration is now open for the FY18 Epi-Tech Surveillance Training Series. Registration through Continuing Medical Education (CME) is required for ALL attendees regardless of service affiliation or CME certification goals.

To register:
1. Log-on or Request log-on ID/password
2. Register for FY18 Epi-Tech Surveillance Training

You only need to register once a year to attend all monthly sessions through September 2018. Attendance will be conducted at each session; at the completion of the activity (after 30 September 2018), you may claim CME certification.

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Report notes biosecurity gaps, low bioterror readiness globally

24 October - In advance of the fourth Annual Global Health Security Agenda ministerial conference this week in Kampala, Uganda, the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) found widespread weaknesses in biosecurity and biosafety systems worldwide and poor bioterror preparedness overall, according to an NTI report yesterday. NTI researchers examined the biosafety and biosecurity-related World Health Organization Joint External Evaluation (JEE) scores from the 39 nations that had published JEE peer reviews as of Oct 17. They found that 74% of the countries had limited or no capacity for a government-wide biosafety and biosecurity system, 64% had little or no capacity for biosafety and biosecurity training, and 41% had low or no capacity for linking public health and security agencies during a biological emergency. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

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Report: Pollution kills 3 times more than AIDS, TB and malaria combined

19 October - Exposure to polluted air, water and soil caused nine million premature deaths in 2015, according to a report published Thursday in The Lancet. The causes of death vary — cancer, lung disease, heart disease. The report links them to pollution, drawing upon previous studies that show how pollution is tied to a wider range of diseases than previously thought. Those studies observed populations exposed to pollutants and compared them to people not exposed. The studies have shown that pollution can be an important cause of diseases — many of them potentially fatal — including asthma, cancer, neurodevelopmental disorders, birth defects in children, heart disease, stroke and lung disease. The nine million figure adds up to 16 percent of all deaths worldwide, killing three times more people than AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined. ... "No country is unaffected," the report notes. But 92 percent of those deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries. NPR

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The 'post-antibiotic apocalypse' can be prevented. Here's how

21 October - The era of antibiotics that began almost a century ago is coming to an end. Diseases that were once easily treatable have become resistant to even the most potent antibiotics. ... Margaret Riley, a molecular biologist at the University of Massachusetts, says we must approach the post-antibiotic era on our own terms — by developing entirely new classes of germ-killing drugs. ... Riley's candidate for the next generation of wonder drugs is a class of proteins called bacteriocins. Chemically and functionally, these naturally occurring compounds are worlds apart from today's treatments. Antibiotics are microbial carpet bombs, wiping out swaths of beneficial bacteria alongside the ones we're trying to kill. Bacteriocins are more like guided missiles. They can be tweaked to target a single species, or even one strain of a species — E. coli bacteria, for instance. Scientific American
World leaders rehearse for a pandemic that will come ‘sooner than we expect’

24 October - ... [A] pandemic simulation [was] held during the World Bank’s annual meeting in Washington this month. It’s not the kind of event that people would typically associate with the World Bank. But it’s the fourth such exercise the bank has helped organize in the past year, reflecting what experts say is the growing awareness outside the traditional global health sector of the increasing threat and economic disruption posed by a global pandemic. The chaotic and “horrendously inefficient” early response to the 2014 Ebola epidemic in West Africa was the catalyst for the simulations, said Tim Evans, senior director for health, nutrition and population at the World Bank. “We realized that people were just making it up as they were going along, including us,” Evans said, referring to the Ebola response. The bank wanted to “move from a history of panic and neglect to one where we’re going to start to prepare much more systematically to be ready for the 100 percent probability we will be dealing with this again,” he said. “Probably sooner than we expect.”

The Washington Post

Yellow fever virus RNA detected in man's semen, urine

24 October - Add yellow fever to the growing list of diseases that might be transmitted sexually, as a case report yesterday in *Emerging Infectious Diseases* describes an infected patient who had yellow fever viral RNA detected in his urine and semen after he had recovered from the disease. [CIDRAP News Scan](sixth item)

INFLUENZA

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

During week 41 (October 8-14, 2017), influenza activity was low in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 41 was influenza A. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories is low.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.

[CDC]
Early neuraminidase inhibitors tied to lower H7N9 deaths in China

25 October - An observational study of 160 people hospitalized with confirmed H7N9 avian influenza infections across five waves of virus activity in China found that early treatment of neuraminidase inhibitors was associated with improved survival and reduced viral shedding, according to a study today in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. ... Of those who were treated within 2 days, 3 (15%) of 20 died, compared with 12 (23.1%) of 52 patients treated within 2 to 5 days and 33 (37.5%) of 88 patients treated after 5 days following symptom onset. Duration of viral shedding was also shorter in people who got the earliest treatment: 4.5 days, compared with as long as 7.5 days in people in the two other groups.

**CIDRAP News Scan** (fourth item)

**ECDC: Flu News Europe**

Week 41/2017 (9 – 15 October 2017)

- Low influenza activity was reported by all 39 reporting countries.
- Influenza viruses were detected sporadically in sentinel specimens with equal numbers of influenza A and B type viruses being detected.
- For week 41/2017, data from the 20 countries or regions reporting to the EuroMOMO project indicated all-cause mortality to be at expected levels for this time of the year. *European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO*

**NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report**

For 19 October:

- **FRI rate spike** at MCRD San Diego has subsided. Eight confirmed cases of influenza A/H3 were seen among unvaccinated recruits during the previous 2 weeks.

  **Moderately elevated FRI rate** at Fort Benning

  **Febrile respiratory illness cases:**

  - Military Recruits - 45 positive of 68 tested
  - CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 14 positive of 25 tested
  - DoD Beneficiaries – 15 positive of 34 tested. *Naval Health Research Center*

**The Next Pandemic**

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History have published a series of article on pandemics in the past, present and future. *Smithsonian.com*
**USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program**

During 1 - 14 October 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 40 & 41), a total of 150 specimens were collected and received from 44 locations. Results were finalized for 145 specimens. During Week 40, one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, three influenza A(H3N2), and one influenza B were detected. During Week 41, one influenza A(H3N2) and one influenza B were detected. The influenza percent positive for Week 40 was at approximately 5% and during Week 41 it was approximately 4%. U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

**VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY**

158 reported ill so far in outbreak blamed on jambalaya: State health department

23 October - Nearly 160 people have been sickened in a Caldwell Parish food-poisoning outbreak sparked by jambalaya tainted with *Salmonella* and a second type of bacteria, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals said in a late Monday afternoon (Oct. 23) update on the outbreak. Of the 158 people who have contracted a gastrointestinal illness from the jambalaya, which was served at a softball team fundraiser, 40 were hospitalized, the health department said. By about 5 pm. Monday, nearly all had been discharged. Those who have been confirmed as sickened in the outbreak range in age from 10 to 82, with an average age of 37, according to the updated numbers released by the health department. Meanwhile, the health department is still investigating one death believed to be related to the outbreak. NOLA.com

Listeria risk prompts Meijer to recall produce in six U.S. states

22 October - Retailer Meijer Inc said it was recalling packaged vegetables in six U.S. states because of possible contamination from *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria, which can cause fatal food poisoning in young children, pregnant women and elderly or frail people. Retailer Meijer Inc said it was recalling packaged vegetables in six U.S. states because of possible contamination from *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria, which can cause fatal food poisoning in young children, pregnant women and elderly or frail people. Reuters

NARMS report shows some improvements in resistant Salmonella but a few red flags

23 October - An annual surveillance report from federal health officials that provides a snapshot of antibiotic resistance in foodborne pathogens gives a mixed picture, showing
that levels are still low overall, with some notable increases, especially in multidrug-resistant Salmonella. The findings from today’s National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System (NARMS) Integrated Report combines 2015 data from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the US Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service. Agencies use the information to help make decisions about preserving the effectiveness of antibiotics for human and animal health and for investigating foodborne illness outbreaks. CIDRAP

WELLNESS

A massive health study on booze, brought to you by big alcohol

26 October - A little bit of booze, the conventional wisdom goes, can be good for you. But the evidence for that claim ... is surprisingly thin. Alcohol studies usually look backwards, comparing participants’ historical drinking habits with their health problems. But it’s hard to prove that alcohol caused those problems. The best alcohol study would randomly require people to either drink or abstain—but for many public health researchers, that’s always seemed like a bridge too far. Today, though, the National Institutes of Health is planning just such an experiment. The Moderate Alcohol and Cardiovascular Health study, now in progress on four continents, is poised to be a breakthrough in public health: the first time that researchers have followed a group of people randomized to receive a daily drink or nothing at all. But it’s also the first time the NIH has offered the $1 trillion-plus alcoholic beverage industry a chance to sponsor a project. That exchange of money, along with the study leaders’ failure to guard against outside influence, are jeopardizing the study’s credibility before it has even enrolled its first participant. Wired

Depression tied to shorter lifespan

25 October - People who suffer from depression may not live as long as individuals who don’t experience this mental health disorder, a Canadian study suggests. Researchers examined six decades of mental health and mortality data on 3,410 adults during three time periods: 1952 to 1967, 1968 to 1990 and 1991 to 2011. Depression was associated with an increased risk of premature death in every decade of the study for men, and starting in the 1990s for women. The connection between depression and a shorter lifespan appeared strongest in the years following a depressive episode, leading the researchers to conclude that at least part of the risk might be reversed by effectively treating the mental illness. Reuters
Hot tub birth tied to life-threatening infection for baby

23 October - A newborn girl in Canada developed a life-threatening infection after being delivered in a hot tub, according to a case report that some doctors say offers fresh evidence that women should not deliver babies in water. The baby girl was delivered full-term and was healthy at birth. But she was hospitalized at eight days old with high fever, poor feeding and fussiness, and then was moved to the intensive care unit (ICU) because her organs were failing, researchers report in the medical journal CMAJ. She was diagnosed with sepsis, a life-threatening immune response to an infection with *Legionella* bacterium that entered her bloodstream. This bacterium thrives in warm water, and the hot tub, which was filled days before her birth, may have created an ideal environment for an infection. Reuters

Pat yourself on the back, America. Your cholesterol levels are holding steady, CDC says.

26 October - When it comes to our health as a nation, we’re not doing so great. Some cancer rates are climbing sharply. Nearly one in eight Americans has diabetes. And we are ballooning in weight, with obesity rates at record highs. Amid that grim picture, government researchers on Thursday had a glimmer of good news: Our cholesterol numbers, which have improved significantly over the past 17 years, are holding steady. Since 1999, the number of Americans suffering from high total cholesterol has declined from 18.3 percent to 12.4 percent in 2016. ... Health experts attribute the positive results to several key factors: the public’s growing awareness of high cholesterol’s dangers, more people’s health-conscious diets, the phaseout of artificial trans fats in the food supply and the use of cholesterol-lowering statin medications. The Washington Post

The FDA will decide whether 26 ingredients count as fiber

23 October - ... The Food and Drug Administration is reviewing 26 ingredients that food manufacturers use to bulk up the fiber content of processed foods to determine if there’s a health benefit. If you’re a nutrition-label reader, the list includes some familiar-ish sounding ingredients — such as inulin, which is often sourced from chicory root. Other ingredients on the “do-these-count-as-fiber?” list include gum acacia, bamboo fiber, retrograded corn starch, and — get ready for a tongue-twister — xyooligosaccharides. Some of these fibers are extracted from plant sources, while others are synthetic. Some critics argue that the FDA should not allow these added fibers to count as fiber on nutrition facts labels. “The food industry has hijacked the advice to eat more fiber by putting isolated, highly processed fiber into what are essentially junk foods,” says Bonnie Liebman of the consumer group Center for Science in the Public Interest. NPR
The ‘Uber for birth control’ expands in conservative states, opening a new front in war over contraception

24 October - It’s a telemedicine app that seems rather innocuous — enter your info, have it reviewed by a physician, and get a prescription. The California-based company behind it has raised millions to support its mission of expanding access to the pill, ring, or morning-after pill with minimal hurdles. But that last option is now starting to attract pushback from anti-abortion activists, who consider the morning-after pill equivalent to abortion — and who say lax telemedicine laws are enabling access to this drug with insufficient oversight. Nurx, an app that’s been called the “Uber for birth control,” lets patients obtain a variety of contraceptives from the touch of a smartphone; it also gives women access to Plan B and Ella, two forms of the morning-after pill, which is effective in preventing a pregnancy after sex. STAT

Troubling history in medical research still fresh for black Americans

25 October - ... [A] huge new project sponsored by the National Institutes of Health [is] called All of Us. "It is a landmark longitudinal research effort that aims to engage 1 million participants of all ethnicities to improve our ability to prevent and treat disease based on individual differences in lifestyle, environment and genetic makeup," [Calvin] Butts says. ... White people like the Halliwells are much more likely than black people to volunteer for medical studies. The reasons are complicated. One is that African-Americans may not get the chance as often — they just aren’t asked by their doctors or don’t have the time or resources to volunteer. But another is that medical research has a long, troubled racial history. One example is the Tuskegee study, which involved doctors letting black men die from syphilis. Another example is the case of Henrietta Lacks. ... So the National Institutes of Health and others have been trying to overcome all that, in part by working with groups like the Abyssinian Baptist Church. NPR

U.S. to promote use of opioid alternatives to treat addiction

25 October - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration plans to encourage widespread use among opioid addicts of less harmful opioid drugs such as methadone and buprenorphine, a radical shift in policy that could draw opposition from those in the addiction field who believe abstinence is the only effective treatment. Speaking before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce on Wednesday, FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb outlined a proposal under which every addict who suffers a non-fatal overdose would be treated with an opioid substitute, for long periods if necessary, or even for life. Reuters

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Africa: Cholera outbreaks in 12 Eastern and Southern African countries

25 October - More than 104,095 cholera/acute watery diarrhea (AWD) cases and 1562 deaths (Case Fatality Rate: 1.5%) have been reported in 12 of 21 countries of Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) since the beginning of 2017. These countries include; Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Somalia accounts for 75% of the total cases reported in 2017, followed by South Sudan at 15.9%. In the past 2 weeks (Week 40-41), 8 out of the 21 countries in ESAR have reported active transmission of cholera/AWD (Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia), with Tanzania reporting the highest number of new cases (153) in week 40. Of the 8 countries, Kenya and South Sudan have recorded the highest CFR at 1.8% in 2017, followed closely by Uganda (1.7%) and Tanzania (1.6%). CFR for Somalia was above 2% at the beginning of 2017 but has since dropped to 1.4%. Outbreak News Today

Chad: CDC issues travel notice for Chad due to cholera outbreak

20 October - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a travel notice today for the central African country of Chad because of a cholera outbreak that started in mid-August. The Ministry of Health of Chad has reported a cholera outbreak in Koukou and Goz Beida Districts in Sila Region and Am Timan District in Salamat Region in the southeast of the country. Since the onset of the outbreak on 14 August 2017, a total of 445 cases including 56 deaths (case fatality rate 12.6%) were reported, as of 25 September 2017. Outbreak News Today

Madagascar: Plague kills 124 in Madagascar, cities most affected

25 October - A plague epidemic in Madagascar has killed 124 people since August in an outbreak that has hit the island’s two main cities the hardest, the authorities said on Wednesday. Plague is endemic in Madagascar, but the outbreak that has caused 1,192 suspected cases since August is especially worrying because it started earlier in the season than usual and has hit urban rather than rural areas. In addition, two thirds of the cases are of the pneumonic plague, the deadliest form of the disease. “The total number of cases (1,192) is already three times higher than the average annual total,” the National Office for Risk and Disaster Management said in a report on Wednesday. ... The capital Antananarivo and Toamasina, the two largest cities in Madagascar, an island in the Indian Ocean, were the most affected, with 55 percent of cases recorded there. To date 54 medical staff have been infected, it said. Reuters
South Africa: High numbers of malaria cases reported - travelers advised to be cautious

20 October - The National Institute for Communicable Diseases has issued an alert and warning for rising numbers of malaria cases being reported in the northern parts of the country. And travelers are being asked to beware. High numbers of malaria cases are being reported in the malaria transmission areas in Limpopo (including some cases in farms along the Lephalale River, Waterberg) and Mpumalanga province. “Unusually mild winter temperatures in malaria areas have allowed for ongoing mosquito and parasite development and led to an early and busy malaria season, which started already in August this year”, the organisation said in a statement. IOL

Uganda: Marburg virus disease

25 October - On 17 October 2017, the Ugandan Ministry of Health notified WHO of a confirmed outbreak of Marburg virus disease in Kween District, Eastern Uganda. The Ministry for Health officially declared the outbreak on 19 October 2017. As of 24 October, five cases have been reported – one confirmed case, one probable case with an epidemiological link to the confirmed case, and three suspected cases including two health workers. Chronologically, the first case-patient (probable case) reported was a male in his 30s, who worked as a game hunter and lived near a cave with a heavy presence of bats. The sister (confirmed case) of the first case-patient nursed him and participated in the burial rituals. The third case-patient (suspected case) is the brother of the first two cases. He assisted in the transport of his sister to the hospital, and subsequently became symptomatic. Two health workers who were in contact with the confirmed case have developed symptoms consistent with Marburg virus disease and are under investigation (suspected cases). As of 23 October, 155 contacts including 66 who had contact with the first case and 89 who had contact with the second case-patient have been listed. WHO

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USCENTCOM

Afghanistan: Afghan healthcare under siege as escalating conflict cuts off access

26 October - Throughout Afghanistan, an increasingly violent struggle for control is threatening access to vital healthcare. Pressure from a web of armed groups, including a resurgent Taliban, has seen medical workers targeted and health clinics commandeered or shut. This has obstructed access to lifesaving care for hundreds of thousands of Afghans this year – and heightened the risk from deadly but treatable diseases like tuberculosis. IRIN
Saudi Arabia: MERS sickens Saudi man from Riyadh

24 October - After a 9-day lapse in cases, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health (MOH) today reported a MERS-CoV infection in a 77-year-old man in Riyadh who had contact with camels before he got sick. In a statement, the MOH said the man is a Saudi citizen who has symptoms of MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) and is listed in stable condition. Today's new case lifts the country's overall MERS-CoV total to 1,732 cases, 702 of them fatal. Four people are still being treated for their infections.

CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

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USEUCOM

Ukraine: Ukraine to ramp up health spending after anti-corruption push

24 October - Ukraine plans a 12 percent increase in health spending next year to exploit reforms passed last week to raise standards and crackdown on corruption in hospitals and surgeries, government ministers told Reuters. Ukrainians die earlier than most Europeans and patients often bribe doctors for treatment or medicine. Kiev's Western backers see healthcare reforms as a test for Ukraine's push for closer ties to the European Union, away from Russia. New legislation will create a national insurance system that pays doctors by the number of patients they have. Hospitals will be paid for services through the new system, rather than receiving lump sums from regional administrations as is now.

Reuters

United Kingdom: How mental health costs up to 300,000 jobs a year

26 October - Up to 300,000 people with long-term mental health problems have to leave their jobs each year, a report says. It also claims poor mental health costs the UK economy up to £99bn each year. ... The UK civil service has agreed to take on the report's recommendations. ... The review makes 40 recommendations about how employers and the government can better support employees to remain at work, such as through creating an online wellbeing portal and using digital technology to support workers in the gig economy. Companies are also being encouraged to include a section on employee mental health in their annual reports. Currently only 11% of companies do this, the report found.

BBC News

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U.S.: Arsenic reductions in drinking water tied to fewer cancer deaths

24 October - The Environmental Protection Agency’s revised rule on arsenic contamination in drinking water has resulted in fewer lung, bladder and skin cancers. In 2006, the E.P.A. reduced the arsenic maximum in public water systems to 10 milligrams per liter, from the previous level of 50 milligrams. ... Using data from a continuing nationwide health survey, researchers compared urinary arsenic levels in 2003, before the new rule went into effect, with those in 2014, after it had been fully implemented. ... They found a 17 percent reduction in arsenic levels among those using public water systems. The researchers estimate that the new rule resulted in 200 to 900 fewer lung and bladder cancers and 50 fewer skin cancers annually. The New York Times

U.S.: Executive Order issued for post-fire waste cleanup in California

24 October - California Gov. Jerry Brown issued an executive order on Oct. 21 allowing EPA officials to help with the initial removal of hazardous waste that poses an imminent threat to public health and safety following major wildfires this month in the state. The order allows qualified professionals at the federal agency to assist state and local officials in immediately removing visible hazardous debris such as batteries, flammable liquids, asbestos siding, paint, and pipe insulation from burned homes. Initial removal of these hazards will help to protect public health and the environment, and it lets residents and cleanup crews more safely enter properties and continue long-term recovery efforts. Occupational Health & Safety

U.S.: Heart health disparities take toll on African-Americans

23 October - African-Americans have worse cardiovascular health and more deaths from heart disease than other groups, at least partly from less effective disease prevention and management efforts, according to a scientific statement from the American Heart Association (AHA). While African Americans are more likely to experience many cardiovascular diseases, in particular strokes and heart failure, they are also more likely to die from cardiovascular diseases,” Dr. Mercedes R. Carnethon from Northwestern University Preventive Medicine in Chicago told Reuters Health by email. Because African Americans develop nearly all cardiovascular diseases - heart attack, stroke, and heart failure - at a relatively young age, she continued, "higher rates of death may arise from the length of time that African Americans live with these conditions." “Interrupting this process by preventing the early onset of cardiovascular diseases is one strategy to reduce disparities in cardiovascular disease mortality,” she said. Reuters
U.S.: Less wealth tied to higher odds of disability and premature death

23 October - People with fewer assets like real estate, savings, stocks and retirement accounts may be more likely to develop disabilities or die prematurely than wealthier individuals, a new study suggests. While plenty of previous research has documented health problems associated with poverty, the current study looked beyond just income to focus on a wide variety of financial resources that adults in the U.S. and UK may accumulate by middle age and beyond. ... For 10 years, the researchers tracked nearly 20,000 participants in the U.S. and England from nationally representative groups of older adults. They looked at two different age groups - 54 to 64 and 66 to 76 - because Medicare and Social Security benefits in the U.S. and the State Pension in England typically begin around age 65. ... In the U.S., people aged 54 to 64 in the lowest of five levels of wealth, with assets of no more than $39,000, had 17 percent risk of death and 48 percent risk of disability over 10 years. By contrast, the wealthiest of the five groups, with more than $560,000, had a death risk of 5 percent and a disability risk of 15 percent. Reuters

U.S.: Rise in mumps outbreaks prompts U.S. panel to endorse 3rd vaccine dose

25 October - A federal expert panel on Wednesday recommended a third dose of the mumps vaccine when an outbreak occurs. The move was in response to the rise in mumps outbreaks since 2006, especially among highly vaccinated college students. More than 6,000 cases of the contagious viral illness were reported last year in the United States, the most in a decade. Unlike outbreaks of measles and whooping cough, which have taken place in populations with significant numbers of unvaccinated people, the mumps outbreaks have occurred in communities with high rates of immunization and people who often have received both recommended doses of the vaccine. Reuters

U.S.: Screening for diabetes is working better than thought

23 October - ... [A] study published Monday in the Annals of Internal Medicine that says some previous efforts have likely overestimated the number of people with undiagnosed diabetes because they relied on a single positive test result. By contrast, this new measure used the American Diabetes Association's diagnostic criteria, which recommend that people with one positive fasting blood glucose or A1C test should have a second test to confirm a diagnosis in all but the most severe and obvious cases of Type 2 diabetes. That's because there's some inherent variability in the tests and because blood sugar levels fluctuate naturally because of exercise, illness and even the time of day. NPR
U.S.: The E.P.A.’s top 10 toxic threats, and industry’s pushback

21 October - The Environmental Protection Agency has published a list of 10 toxic threats it will evaluate first under a law passed last year intended to crack down on hazardous chemicals. They are among 90 chemicals identified by the agency that may harm children, damage nerve tissue, cause cancer, contaminate the environment, accumulate in the bloodstream or show up in consumer products. As the review begins, industry and other interest groups are urging the E.P.A. to limit any restrictions. The New York Times

U.S.: Trump declares opioid epidemic public health emergency – here’s what that means

26 October - President Trump officially declared the opioid crisis a “public health emergency” Thursday afternoon. ... Trump laid out details of how his administration plans to combat the growing crisis – including promoting a massive anti-drug ad campaign – and instructed the Health and Human Services (HHS) secretary to declare the epidemic a public health emergency. It’s important that the full weight of the federal government – with each Cabinet department determining their role in the crisis – is involved in tackling the epidemic, said Tom Coderre, a former official with the Obama administration’s HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Fox News

HURRICANE AFTERMATH

Advice for providers treating patients in or recently returned from hurricane-affected areas, including Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands

24 October - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working with federal, state, territorial, and local agencies and global health partners in response to recent hurricanes. CDC is aware of media reports and anecdotal accounts of various infectious diseases in hurricane-affected areas, including Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands (USVI). Because of compromised drinking water and decreased access to safe water, food, and shelter, the conditions for outbreaks of infectious diseases exist. The purpose of this HAN advisory is to remind clinicians assessing patients currently in or recently returned from hurricane-affected areas to be vigilant in looking for certain infectious diseases, including leptospirosis, dengue, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, vibriosis, and influenza. Additionally, this Advisory provides guidance to state and territorial health departments on enhanced disease reporting. CDC
A man who helped repair homes after Hurricane Harvey just died of flesh-eating bacteria

25 October - A 31-year-old Texas man died of a rare flesh-eating bacterial infection last week, nearly two months after Hurricane Harvey made landfall and the man began repairing homes damaged by the floods. On Monday, the Galveston County Health District said the man went to a hospital on Oct. 10 with a “seriously” infected wound on his upper left arm. He was diagnosed with necrotizing fasciitis — a rare bacterial infection that kills soft tissue — and died six days later. The Houston news channel KHOU identified the man as Josue Zurita. An obituary said Zurita was a hard-working carpenter who left Mexico to help provide for his family, and that he became infected while working to rebuild Harris and Galveston counties. The Washington Post

Leptospirosis cases rise in Puerto Rico, may become more prevalent

25 October - In a follow-up on our initial report of leptospirosis in Puerto Rico post Hurricane Maria, the state epidemiologist for Puerto Rico, Dr. Carmen Deseda said at least 76 cases of suspected and confirmed leptospirosis, including a handful of deaths, have now been reported a month after Hurricane Maria struck and devastated the island. Two deaths involved leptospirosis confirmed through laboratory testing, and “several other” deaths are pending test results, Deseda said. The island typically sees between 63 and 95 cases per year, she said. Health officials had expected that there would be a jump after the hurricane. “It’s neither an epidemic nor a confirmed outbreak,” Public Affairs Secretary Ramon Rosario Cortes said at a news conference Sunday. Outbreak News Today

Power unlikely to be fully restored in Puerto Rico until after Christmas, Army 3-star says

20 October - Puerto Rico may not have the majority of its power generation back until January or February, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commander Lt. Gen. Todd Semonite said Friday during a briefing on hurricane relief efforts. “The governor has made a milestone of trying to get 30 percent of the Puerto Rican load up by the end of October, and then 50 percent by the end of November,” Semonite said. “I personally think those are stretch goals, but we’re very, very committed to trying to meet where the governor’s at. ... I personally think it’s going to go into January and February to get the majority of the backup running.” Military Times
Tesla has built a solar farm to power a storm-damaged children's hospital in Puerto Rico

25 October - Tesla Inc. said it has assembled a solar panel installation and battery storage project at hurricane-battered children’s hospital in Puerto Rico in a humanitarian effort that also illustrates the company’s ability to deliver power quickly. The Palo Alto electric carmaker and solar energy company tweeted photos of the project showing rows of solar panels being installed in what appears to be a parking lot adjacent to the Hospital del Niño in San Juan. Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk said on Instagram that the hospital needed more power than a typical roof installation could provide, and that this system would allow it to operate completely off the grid. Los Angeles Times

U.S. hospitals wrestle with shortages of drug supplies made in Puerto Rico

23 October - One of the workhorses of Clarke County Hospital, a 25-bed facility in rural Osceola, Iowa, is an unassuming product known as a “Mini-Bag.” It is a small, fluid-filled bag used by nurses to dilute drugs, like antibiotics, so that they can be dripped slowly into patients' veins. ... Now, hospital pharmacists across the country are racing to find alternatives — which themselves are becoming scarce — after Hurricane Maria halted production at the factory in Puerto Rico where Baxter, the manufacturer, makes the product. The bag shortage is the most significant to be directly linked to the effects of the hurricane but others are likely to follow. In addition to creating a humanitarian crisis on the island, the storm knocked out production at the Puerto Rican factories that make vital drugs, medical devices and medical supplies that are used around the world. The New York Times

China: China shuts down tens of thousands of factories in unprecedented pollution crackdown

23 October - ... Entire industrial regions of China are being temporarily shut down, and the unusual sight of blue skies is reappearing as environmental inspectors go about their work. After decades of doing little about the pollution that has plagued much of the country, China’s government may be finally getting serious about enforcing its environmental laws. ... In the past year, China’s Ministry of Environment has sent inspectors to 10 provinces,
where they’ve reprimanded, fined, or charged officials in more than 80,000 factories with
criminal offenses. Entire swaths of Eastern China have halted production, prompting some
companies to move entire supply chains to countries like India and Bangladesh to meet
their orders. NPR

Japan: Typhoon leaves flooding, four dead in Japan before moving out to sea

22 October - A rapidly weakening typhoon Lan made landfall in Japan on Monday, setting off landslides and
flooding that prompted evacuation orders for tens of thousands of people, but then headed out to sea after
largely sparing the capital, Tokyo. but then headed out to sea after largely sparing the capital, Tokyo. Four people
were reported killed, hundreds of plane flights canceled, and train services disrupted in the
wake of Lan, which had maintained intense strength until virtually the time it made landfall
west of Tokyo in the early hours of Monday. Reuters

North Korea: North Korea could be mass producing biological weapons to unleash smallpox and plague, report warns

24 October - North Korea is likely to be developing biological weapons alongside its nuclear
programme, a new report has warned. A new study by the Belfer Centre, a US thinktank,
warns that Pyongyang is likely to have a programme to develop its biological weaponry.
Based on testimony from defectors, it is believed to have begun in the 1960s after the
Korean War between 1950 and 1953 caused the deaths of thousands in outbreaks of
cholera, typhus, typhoid, and smallpox which the regime blamed on biological attacks by
the US. ... It is thought to be producing several different diseases and manmade biological
weapons that the US deems dangerous such as plague, anthrax, viral haemorrhagic fevers
and smallpox. South Korean intelligence believes there are at least three possible biological
weapons production facilities and seven research centres associated with developing them.
Independent

Thailand: Thailand enters 'War on Sugar' with tax on sweetened beverages

20 October - Thailand has slapped tariffs on sugar likely to hit $9 million worth of U.S.
beverage exports, the U.S. Agriculture Department said on Friday, as one of the top
producers of the sweetener joins a growing list of regions implementing such taxes. The
Thai government implemented its first-ever excise tax on sugar in beverages in a bid to
reduce consumption, the report published on USDA’s website said, citing industry estimates
for the potential impacts on U.S. manufacturers like PepsiCo Inc, Coca-Cola Co and Dr
Pepper Snapple Group Inc. Governments around the world have been weighing
introduction of taxes on sugary beverages in order to stem health epidemics including diabetes and obesity. Reuters

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USSOUTHCOM

Brazil: Yellow fever case confirmed in rural Brazil

25 October - A fatal yellow fever case has been confirmed in a resident of Itatiba, a city in Brazil's Sao Paulo state, located about 50 miles north the state's capital city, according to an Oct 17 city government statement translated and posted yesterday by ProMED Mail. ... The man, age 76, lived in a region between the cities of Itatiba and Jundiai. Thirteen monkeys in the area have tested positive for yellow fever, and health officials are investigating another possible human case. An immunization campaign had been held in the affected rural area in April, reaching about 41,000 people. Local health officials are stepping up vaccination in the wake of the latest detection. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

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