28 April 2017

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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The Army Public Health Update is a collection of articles taken verbatim from public sources to offer awareness of current health issues and the media coverage given to them. The articles do not necessarily represent US Army Medical Department opinions, views, policy, or guidance, and should not be construed or interpreted as being endorsed by the US Army Medical Command.

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USPACOM

- China: Hong Kong reports increase in scarlet fever in March
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Injury Prevention:  
Just the Facts  
Musculoskeletal Injuries

Musculoskeletal (MSK) injuries occur when energy (physical stress) applied to bones, muscles, tendons, joints, ligaments, cartilage, or associated tissues exceeds the capacity for normal tissue function. This can result in trauma to the MSK tissues all at once or as less obvious "micro-traumas" that accumulate over a period of time. Those who are less fit are especially at risk when starting a new strenuous training activity or restarting a routine after a rest period. Though female Soldiers have higher risk of stress fractures and higher overall MSK injury rates, they have also tended to be less fit. Smoking has been shown to increase injury risk. While evidence shows that a high body-mass index (BMI) increases injury risk, Soldiers with extremely low BMI may also be at higher risk especially if they are not very fit. Both Soldiers who are extremely flexible and those who are not flexible have increased injury risk.

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**U.S. MILITARY**

Airmen dodge 30 heat stress cases with USARIEM's ECTemp algorithm

24 April - ... The military has long needed a non-invasive monitoring device that can track warfighters’ physiological health during field operations and training. In this technological age when mission leaders and medics need to know the health status of their troops to make quick decisions, real-time guidance on heat illness prevention is more important than ever. The Estimated Core Temperature, or ECTemp, algorithm, developed by Dr. Mark Buller at the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, helps fulfill that need. The ECTemp algorithm provides accurate estimates of core body temperature simply by analyzing heart rate changes over time, allowing mission leaders to detect if a Soldier is at increased risk of heat illness. ... According to a study the Air Force Research Laboratory conducted, the algorithm has proven to be successful in real-world scenarios. ... "Using the ECTemp has helped them identify and mitigate over 30 cases of heat stress and prevented more serious heat stress casualty situations." Army.mil

ATS-NIH address chemical inhalation disasters

24 April - The confirmed use of the chemical nerve agent sarin, or a sarin-like substance, in the attack that killed close to 90 Syrians earlier in April, as well as the use of toxic chemicals as bioterrorism weapons by ISIS, highlight the urgent need for the development of better medical countermeasures to the accidental or intentional release of inhaled toxic chemicals, experts said. An expert panel from the American Thoracic Society (ATS) and the NIH detail the latest research on inhalational lung injuries, along with efforts to develop novel treatments and medical countermeasures to respond to mass exposures to chemical irritants, toxicants, blistering agents, and nerve agents. MedPage Today

Bills would expand VA telehealth services across state lines

25 April - Telehealth services for veterans have expanded dramatically in recent years, but a group of lawmakers worries that federal rules governing that remote care haven’t kept up. On Tuesday, a bipartisan group of House members and senators reintroduced legislation designed to boost access for veterans by easing those rules, arguing that patients in rural areas or facing travel difficulties are being disadvantaged by outdated regulations. ... [Current] rules bar physicians from providing those services across state lines, unless both ...
the veteran and the doctor are located in federal facilities. That limits the telehealth options for individuals in remote areas, like Alaska and Hawaii, and still forces many veterans to travel significant distances to get to an approved facility. The bills introduced in the House and Senate would change that, allowing veterans to receive remote care anywhere, including a home or nearby community center. Military Times

Nearly 400 military bases must be tested for water contamination

25 April - Contamination from former or current military installations has ignited a nationwide review of water on or around bases that used a firefighting foam containing toxic chemicals. The military is now testing nearly 400 bases and has confirmed water contamination at or near more than three dozen. ... The new numbers offer the best look to date at the potential scope of the problem. But despite more than $150 million spent on the effort so far, the process has been slow and seemingly disjointed. The Air Force, for example, has completed sampling at nearly all of its targeted bases; the Navy, barely 10 percent. The Army has not begun.* The branches and the Pentagon say they are coordinating, but have varying responses on how many bases must be tested, and limited information about remediation timelines and cost. Military.com

*APHC experts note that the Army began sampling in July 2016 and all active Army drinking water systems have been sampled; the ARNG will sample 70 sites by mid-May 2017 and their final 15 sites later in FY17. Over 500 of the 2,700 privatized/purchased DWS worldwide have been sampled and sampling will continue until all are complete.

VA launches center for patient-centered healthcare innovation

19 April - The VA has launched its Center for Compassionate Innovation (CCI) to help produce and deliver patient-centered healthcare innovations and treatment options to veterans. The CCI will explore cutting-edge medical therapies and emerging workflow practices through small pilot tests throughout the VA healthcare network. These healthcare innovations will primarily pertain to post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, chronic pain, and suicide. Additionally, the VA will consider exploring any healthcare innovation that is safe, ethical, and focuses on improving veteran health and well-being. Patient EngagementHIT

GLOBAL

Antidepressant may enhance drug delivery to the brain

27 April - New research from the National Institutes of Health found that pairing the antidepressant amitriptyline with drugs designed to treat central nervous system diseases,
enables drug delivery to the brain by inhibiting the blood-brain barrier in rats. The blood-brain barrier serves as a natural, protective boundary, preventing most drugs from entering the brain. ... Although researchers caution that more studies are needed to determine whether people will benefit from the discovery, the new finding has the potential to revolutionize treatment for a whole host of brain-centered conditions, including epilepsy, stroke, human amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), depression, and others. The results are so promising that a provisional patent application has been filed for methods of co-administration of amitriptyline with central nervous system drugs. NIH

Cheap blood drug could prevent thousands of maternal deaths in developing world

26 April - A cheap and widely available drug could save the lives of one in three of the 100,000 new mothers who bleed to death after childbirth every year, mostly in poorer countries, according to the first study of its use in postpartum haemorrhage. In a trial of 20,000 women, researchers found that the drug, called tranexamic acid or TXA, cut the number of deaths due to post-partum bleeding by 31 percent if given within three hours. The treatment costs about $2.50 in most countries, they said. As TXA works by stopping blood clots from breaking down, the researchers also found that it reduced the need for urgent surgery to control bleeding by more than a third. Reuters

Experts excited by brain 'wonder-drug'

20 April - In 2013, a UK Medical Research Council team stopped brain cells dying in an animal for the first time, creating headline news around the world. But the compound used was unsuitable for people, as it caused organ damage. Now two drugs have been found that should have the same protective effect on the brain and are already safely used in people. [Prof Giovanna Mallucci] wants to start human clinical trials on dementia patients soon and expects to know whether the drugs work within two to three years. ... Since 2013, the research group has tested more than 1,000 ready-made drugs on nematode worms, human cells in a dish and mice. Two were shown to prevent both a form of dementia and prion disease by stopping brain cells dying. ... The best known drug of the pair is trazodone, which is already taken by patients with depression. The other, DBM, is being tested in cancer patients. BBC News

IARC classifies welding fumes and UV radiation as Group 1 carcinogens

25 April - The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified welding fumes and UV radiation from welding as Group 1 carcinogens, according to a report. Welding fumes were previously classified in Group 2B, but new evidence from research motivated the change. Two related chemicals, molybdenum trioxide and indium tin oxide, were classified in Group 2B as possibly carcinogenic to humans based on “sufficient evidence.” The group will meet again in June to review chemicals in food and consumer products. Occupational Health & Safety
Is it time for hearing aids to be sold over the counter?

24 April - ... The Hearing Loss Association of America, a consumer group, wants Congress to create a new category of aids for people with mild to moderate hearing loss by passing the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017. (People with severe hearing loss would still need to be seen by a medical professional.) The bill would direct the FDA to come up with safety and effectiveness standards for these new hearing aids. The FDA is already moving in that direction, and in December said it would no longer require adults to be medically evaluated before buying a hearing aid. Proponents of direct-to-consumer sales hope Congressional action would get the FDA moving faster. A 2016 report from the National Academies of Sciences also endorsed allowing over-the-counter sales. NPR

Scientists create artificial womb that could help prematurely born babies

25 April - Scientists have created an "artificial womb" in the hopes of someday using the device to save babies born extremely prematurely. So far the device has only been tested on fetal lambs. A study published Tuesday involving eight animals found the device appears effective at enabling very premature fetuses to develop normally for about a month. ... "They've had normal growth. They've had normal lung maturation. They've had normal brain maturation. They've had normal development in every way that we can measure it," [Alan] Flake says. Flake says the group hopes to test the device on very premature human babies within three to five years. NPR

Study finds how polluting nanoparticles get into blood and damage hearts

26 April - Inhaled nanoparticles like those pumped out in vehicle exhausts can work their way through the lungs and into the bloodstream where they can raise the risk of heart attack and stroke, scientists said on Wednesday. In experiments using harmless ultra-fine particles of gold, the scientists were able for the first time to track how such nanoparticles are breathed in, pass through the lungs and then gain access to the blood. Most worryingly, the researchers said at a briefing in London, the nanoparticles tend to build up in damaged blood vessels of people who already suffer from coronary heart disease – the condition that causes heart attacks - and make it worse. Reuters

Studying splashes to learn more about how disease spreads

22 April - Lydia Bourouiba, an applied mathematician at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, studies sneezes at a level of detail most of us have never imagined — under bright lights, using advanced imaging technology. ... Bourouiba's research has modeled how
Using elements of viruses, antibodies to fight resistant bacteria

21 April - A team of scientists at The Rockefeller University in New York City has developed an anti-infective therapy that combines a tool produced by bacteria-killing viruses with the disease-fighting capabilities of the human immune system, a combination they hope could be a potent weapon in the fight against antibiotic-resistant pathogens. The work stems from research... with bacteriophages, or phages—the ubiquitous viruses found in nature that infect and then destroy bacteria using enzymes called lysins. ... [W]hen lysins are administered to bacterial pathogens in culture dishes and infected mice, the enzymes seek out and destroy the bacterial cells from the outside. So far, the approach has proven effective in experiments against nearly all gram-positive bacteria. Now, [the researchers] describe a new iteration of this research, in which they've combined lysins with elements of antibodies, the proteins produced by the human immune system to fight invasive diseases.

CIDRAP

WHO urges action over growing hepatitis epidemic

21 April - The number of people dying from hepatitis is rising, and most of the 325 million infected are unaware they have the virus and lack access to potentially life-saving medicines, the World Health Organization said on Friday. In its first global report on the infection, the WHO said that with millions at risk of a slow progression to chronic liver disease, cancer and premature death, swift action on testing and treatment was needed. ... The 325 million cases reported are of hepatitis B (HBV) or hepatitis C virus (HCV) – the main types of the five different hepatitis infections and responsible for 96 percent of deaths from the disease. ... New B virus infections are falling, thanks to a vaccine given as a part of childhood immunization that 84 percent of babies born in 2015 were given, according to the WHO report. Reuters

ZIKA VIRUS

High level of heart defects found in Zika-affected babies

21 April - Echocardiography evaluation of a group of Brazilian babies with Zika-related birth defects found three times the expected rate of congenital heart disease (CHD), but only one infant had symptoms and most had minor septal defects that weren't hemodynamically significant. The study is the first time CHD has been assessed in infants with
congenital Zika infections, and so far there haven’t been any reports of autopsy findings suggesting a connection, but other flaviviruses such as dengue have been associated with myocarditis and pericarditis. ... Echocardiograms suggested CHD in 14 (13.5%) of the 103 infants. CIDRAP

Studies highlight Zika-linked neurologic damage

24 April - ... Two Brazilian babies who died shortly after birth were found to have severe spinal cord injuries linked to prenatal Zika exposure. ... The authors said understanding how the virus attacks the spine could help doctors treat Zika-affected children. “This diagnosis must be considered in cases where brain damage is insufficient to justify the motor deficit presented by the infant,” the authors conclude. ... In the other study, authors ... describe a teen who suffered cognitive impairment after traveling to a Zika-endemic region and testing positive. ... Eight days after the first symptoms appeared, the patient began experiencing new and troubling psychiatric symptoms, including increased energy, anxiety, racing thoughts, impulsivity, and rapid speech. The psychiatric symptoms got better but did not resolve during the next 15 weeks, and the patient was treated with antipsychotic medication. ... Two other studies ... show that the Zika virus could be transmitted via the *Aedes albopictus* mosquito but not *Culex quinquefasciatus* mosquitoes. Neither *Ae albopictus* nor *Cx quinquefasciatus* were as competent at transmitting Zika as the *Ae aegypti*, the primary insect vector. CIDRAP

U.S. Army rejects pricing concerns in grant of exclusive patent license to Sanofi on Zika vaccine

24. April - Today, KEI received a letter from the U.S. Army dated April 21, 2017, signed by Barry M. Datlof, in which the Army largely rejected concerns raised in comments submitted by KEI and various other public interest groups related to the proposed grant of an exclusive license to the French drug company Sanofi on a U.S. Army-invented vaccine for Zika virus. On December 21, 2016, KEI asked the Army to include reasonable pricing terms in the exclusive license, in order to ensure an affordable price on the vaccine for U.S. taxpayers and people in low income countries. ... The Army wrote KEI and groups that co-signed the January 12, 2017 comments that it does not have the “means, expertise, and authority to define, implement, and enforce ‘affordable prices’ or to set price controls for a potential vaccine that will require great investment and face high risk of failure,” and made similar argument for not addressing the affordability and access issues for developing countries. Knowledge Ecology International

Zika case counts in the U.S.

Zika virus disease is now a nationally notifiable condition. Cases are reported to CDC by state, territorial, and local health departments using standard case definitions. This webpage contains provisional data reported to ArboNET for January 1, 2015 – April 19, 2017. CDC
U.S. States
5,238 Zika virus disease cases reported
- 4,939 cases in travelers returning from affected areas
- 223 cases acquired through presumed local mosquito-borne transmission in Florida (N=217) and Texas (N=6)
- 76 cases acquired through other routes, including sexual transmission (N=46), congenital infection (N=28), laboratory transmission (N=1), and person-to-person through an unknown route (N=1)

U.S. Territories
36,569 Zika virus disease cases reported
- 143 cases in travelers returning from affected areas
- 36,426 cases acquired through presumed local mosquito-borne transmission
- 0 cases acquired through other routes*

*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 15:
- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal for the majority of the U.S.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal across EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal across PACOM except for the ROK, which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity was minimal for locations with available data in CENTCOM and AFRICOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity was minimal in Honduras this week based on DMSS data. DHA - Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report
For the week ending 15 April 2017 (Week 15):
All regions demonstrated an overall decline in influenza activity since a peak in week 7. This decrease in influenza activity has also been reported in both DoD and civilian populations.
- ILI Activity: Army ILI (influenza-like illness) outpatient visits in week 15 were 4% higher than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Three hospitalized influenza-associated cases were reported to APHC through DRSi in week 15. All were reported in non-AD beneficiaries and none had been vaccinated.
- Viral specimens: During week 15, 251 of 1134 (22%) lab specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. Of 97 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-A reported 49
(50.5%), followed by RHC-C (43, 44.3%), RHC-P (3, 3.1%), and RHC-E (2, 2.1%).

CENTCOM did not report any positive influenza A specimens. APHC

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

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 15 was influenza B. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories decreased.
- **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:** Five influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. CDC

**ECDC: Flu News Europe**

Week 15/2017 (10 – 16 April 2017):
- Influenza activity across the region decreased further with 41 of 43 countries reporting low influenza activity.
- The proportion of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza virus was 14%, lower compared to the previous week (17%).
- The proportion of type B viruses exceeded the proportion of type A viruses in sentinel detections, similar to recent previous weeks. However, the overall number of type B virus detections remained low.

European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

**New CDC guidelines on flu pandemic measures reflect 2009 lessons**

24 April - New federal guidelines on using nonpharmaceutical measures to fight influenza pandemics reflect lessons learned during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, with changes that include a new framework for gauging the severity of the threat in the early stages. The guidelines, covering the use of such steps as home quarantine, face masks, school closings, and social distancing, were issued Apr 21 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They replace guidelines issued in 2007 and represent an effort to improve planning and decision-making on when to use nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). CIDRAP

**NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update**

For 2017 Week 15 (through 15 April 2017):
- Influenza: One case of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (influenza B) among US military basic trainees at Fort Benning.
• FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at Fort Benning. Naval Health Research Center

Officials report 29 more cases of H7N9 in China

25 April - In its latest weekly influenza report, Hong Kong’s Centre for Health Protection (CHP) today confirmed 29 new H7N9 avian flu cases in mainland China, the most since late February. There have now been 616 cases of H7N9 reported in China since October of last year, in what is the country’s fifth wave of the disease, the CHP said. Seven of the cases are in Beijing, with Hunan reporting 5 cases; Hebei, 4; Sichuan, 3; Shandong, 2; Zhejiang, 2; and Anhui, Gansu, Guangxi, Jiangxi, Jilin, and Liaoning with one each. Eight of the patients died from avian flu complications, one is in critical condition, and the remaining reported severe pneumonia. Only two of the new cases were classified as mild. Eighteen of the patients were men, 11 were women, and the range of ages was 34 to 79 years.
CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

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

During 2 - 15 April 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 14 & 15), a total of 267 specimens were collected and received from 42 locations. Results were finalized for 204 specimens from 40 locations. During Week 14, two influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, 28 influenza A(H3N2), one influenza A(H3N2) & influenza B coinfection, and 35 influenza B viruses were identified. During Week 15, 12 influenza A(H3N2) and 17 influenza B viruses were identified. Approximately 40% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 14. Approximately 29% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 15. The influenza percent positive for the season is currently 36%.
US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Lay’s and Miss Vickie’s potato chips recalled for Salmonella

24 April - Frito-Lay is voluntarily recalling some of their Jalapeño Flavored Lay’s Kettle Cooked potato chips and Jalapeño Flavored Miss Vickie’s Kettle Cooked potato chips due to the potential presence of Salmonella in the seasoning. Jalapeño powder provided by a supplier could contain Salmonella bacteria. No Salmonella was found in the seasoning supplied to Frito-Lay, but the company has decided to recall the products. No illnesses have been confirmed to date in connection with this issue. Food Poisoning Bulletin
U.S. Veterinary Corps participate in first naval task force meeting in France

25 April - Eighteen veterinary public health officials from NATO and NATO-allied nations, including France, Portugal, Finland, Norway, and the United States participated in the first Naval Task force meeting in Toulon, France March 20-24. The group discussed the unique challenges of food and water support to naval vessels in the region and attendees agreed that common standards are necessary to attain reliable interoperability between NATO military ships. Differences between naval operations and ground operations can be significant and thus require a freestanding regulation which specifically defines standards, to include food safety and defense, and potable water safety and defense. … United States Veterinary Corps participation in the Naval Task Force meeting fostered international cooperation and enhanced relationships with allies. Army.mil

Yokota commander closes Chili’s after public health inspection

22 April - Air Force officials have shut down a Chili’s restaurant at Yokota in western Tokyo, but have yet to release details from an inspection that led to the decision. “Citing a recent public health inspection, the 374th Airlift Wing Commander has taken the proactive approach to close Chili’s Bar and Grill until further notice,” the Yokota Force Support Squadron announced Thursday on its official Facebook page. The notice did not give a specific reason for closing the popular restaurant. The facility was “sanitary at all times” but “other concerns were raised that caused the commander to take precautionary steps to close Chili’s,” the notice said. Inspections are handled by the 374th Medical Group Public Health section, said officials who did not respond Friday to a request for a copy of the public health inspection report. Such reports are considered public record throughout the United States. Japan Stripes

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WELLNESS

Binge drinkers beware: study finds link between alcohol and heart arrhythmias

26 April – … Over the course of the 16-day [Oktoberfest] festival … researchers collected data on blood alcohol concentration and heart rate for 3,028 people, using smartphone-based breathalyzer and ECG instruments. The average age was about 35 years old. The average blood alcohol content was 0.85 g/kg, which is approximately equal to a BAC of 0.09 percent using the U.S. blood alcohol measurement system. … They found what they
describe in the study as “a profound association of acute alcohol consumption with sinus tachycardia,” which Sinner describes as “increased heart rate with no justification.” They also found that, while the heart rate generally varies as a person’s breathing rate changes, that ability decreased as people drank more. In fact, the more alcohol people had consumed, the more likely they were to experience both symptoms, the data showed. NPR

Blue-blocking lenses help warfighters, shift-workers get sleep

20 April – … [Phones, computers and televisions] give off a blue light that can impact our sleep. Right now, the military’s working on a blue-light-blocking lens, like in eyeglasses, that could make a difference not only for warfighters, but also for our sleep. “We give our military members more and more work to do and less opportunity for sleep,” says Dr. Nita Shattuck, sleep expert at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. … She is studying how blue-blocking lenses worn by deployed, active-duty military members two hours before bed can shield the blue light. … “In our study the participants were going to sleep 30 percent faster than when they weren’t wearing the glasses. I think this has huge implications for civilian shift-workers, for police officers, firefighters, and first responders,” Shattuck says. Another type of glasses gives off blue light and can tell your body it’s morning, helping to adjust a person’s cycle even in the middle of the night. … Shattuck says it’s best to just step away from our devices two hours before bedtime. WTSP

Daily nutrition strategies for endurance

26 April -Many people only think about performance nutrition in terms of what to eat just before or after a competition. However, the effect of nutrition on your training and performance starts long before. Performance nutrition really begins during training, when you consistently fuel your body with the proper amounts and kinds of calories and nutrients. The nutrition information in this article is meant to provide a solid foundation to help you train for sporting events, military operations, training events, or rucks lasting longer than 60 minutes. Health.mil

Diet sodas tied to dementia and stroke

26 April - A new study links diet soft drinks to an increased risk for stroke and dementia. Researchers studied more than 4,000 people over 45 who had filled out food-frequency questionnaires and had periodic health examinations between 1991 and 2001. The scientists tracked their health over the next 10 years and found 97 cases of stroke and 81 cases of dementia. The study … found that compared with those who did not drink diet soda, people who drank one to six artificially sweetened drinks a week had twice the risk of stroke. There were similar, although weaker, associations for dementia risk. The reasons for the link remain unknown. The New York Times
Genomic variation may reveal ‘biological pathway’ to obesity

26 April - African-Americans have the highest age-adjusted rates of obesity in the U.S. Now, an NIH study is offering clues to why that is. Researchers from the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Kwame Nkumrah University of Science and Technology, University of Ghana, and University of Maryland collaborated in a study and found about 1% of West Africans, African-Americans, and others of African ancestry carry a genomic variant that increases their risk of obesity. People with the genomic differences were about 6 pounds heavier than those without the variant. This is the first study to use a Genome-Wide Association Study (GWAS) to investigate the genomic basis of obesity in continental Africans. Federal Practitioner

No Bull: Energy drinks tied to cardiac changes

26 April - Drinking a high-volume energy drink was linked to more heart and blood pressure changes compared with a control drink containing the same amount of caffeine, according to a small crossover study of military personnel. Those in the energy drink arm had a significantly higher change in corrected QT interval, a measure of cardiac repolarization, compared with those in the caffeine arm at 2 hours after baseline, reported Emily A. Fletcher, PharmD, of David Grant U.S.A.F. Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base Fairfield, Calif., and colleagues. "Based on this preliminary evidence in young, healthy adults, people who have high blood pressure, underlying cardiac conditions or other health issues might want to avoid or use caution when consuming energy drinks until more is known about their impact on heart health," wrote the authors. MedPage Today

NSC's Injury Facts 2017: 'Alarming trends, alarming data'

26 April - The National Safety Council’s Injury Facts 2017 Edition is out, and it sheds new light on the impact of fatigue by industry. That’s one of the new wrinkles in this edition, which also for the first time looks at preventable death rates by ethnic origin and race, correlations between recessions and motor vehicle deaths (deaths and death rates decline during them, it shows), as well as some encouraging early data ... from the Insurance Loss Data Institute on assistive vehicle technologies’ impact on property damage and bodily injuries. NSC said these issues were included for the first time in the 2017 edition “because of alarming trends” and some categories have been expanded this time – mortality numbers by mode of transportation, preventable deaths by state, rising teen driver deaths, etc. – “because of alarming data.” Occupational Health & Safety

The best thing to eat before a workout? Maybe nothing at all

26 April - For those who can stomach it, working out before breakfast may be more beneficial for health than eating first, according to a useful new study of meal timing and
physical activity. Its results indicate that when we eat affects how much fat we burn during exercise and also alters molecular activity within fat cells, in ways that could have long-term implications for our physical well-being. ... [Researchers found that the men] burned more fat during walks on an empty stomach than when they had eaten first. On the other hand, they burned slightly more calories, on average, during the workout after breakfast than after fasting. But it was the impacts deep within the fat cells that may have been the most consequential. ... Multiple genes behaved differently, depending on whether someone had eaten or not before walking. Many of these genes produce proteins that can improve blood sugar regulation and insulin levels throughout the body and so are associated with improved metabolic health. These genes were much more active when the men had fasted before exercise than when they had breakfasted. The New York Times

U.S. House bill would exempt e-cigarettes from tobacco regulations

25 April - A bill expected this week in the U.S. House of Representatives would weaken a Food and Drug Administration rule governing e-cigarettes and represent a major victory for the $4.4 billion U.S. vaping industry. The bill, from Republican Representative Duncan Hunter of California, would reverse the Obama administration's "Deeming Rule" which deems e-cigarettes to be tobacco products, subject to the same strict regulations governing traditional cigarettes. E-cigarettes heat nicotine-laced liquid into vapor but do not contain tobacco. Hunter's bill ... would exempt vaping devices from many of those rules, including a requirement that new products be reviewed and authorized by the FDA before being sold. Reuters

Why flavored waters are bad for your teeth

25 April - ... [D]rinking too much flavored water — sparkling or still — could do serious damage to your teeth. The problem is that these drinks' flavor essences, mostly citric and other fruit acids, cause significant tooth erosion — “the incremental dissolving away of the enamel on the teeth, which, over time, can affect their structural integrity, making them hypersensitive to temperature and potentially more cavity-prone,” explains Edmond R. Hewlett, consumer adviser for the American Dental Association and professor at the UCLA School of Dentistry. A beverage’s pH is the main determinant of its potential to erode teeth. Anything with a pH less than 4 is considered a threat to dental health. ... [U]n-carbonated flavored waters such as grape, lemon or strawberry Dasani had a pH of 3, only somewhat better than RC Cola and Coca-Cola, which were among the most acidic tested, at 2.32 and 2.37 respectively. The Washington Post
Africa: WHO - Malaria vaccine to be 'real life' tested in Africa

24 April - The world's first malaria vaccine will be available in selected areas of Ghana, Kenya and Malawi from 2018, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The UN body's regional office for Africa said in a statement on Monday that RTS,S injectable vaccine was developed to protect young children from the deadliest form of malaria caused by Plasmodium falciparum. ... WHO said the vaccine had already been tested on children aged five and 17 months in clinical trials, but the latest programme aimed at seeing whether the protective effect can be replicated in real life. It will assess the feasibility of delivering the required four doses of the vaccine and its safety in the context of routine use, the statement said. Al Jazeera

Burundi: CDC travel notice issued for Burundi due to malaria outbreak

24 April - The Burundi Ministry of Health declared a malaria epidemic on Mar. 13 due to increased numbers of malaria in the country. In fact, all of the country's 18 provinces are reporting higher numbers of malaria cases than expected. ... Just during the first three months of 2017, Burundi has reported 1,960,620 with 869 deaths. This prompted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to issue a travel notice for Burundi today. CDC continues to recommend that travelers to Burundi take prescription medicine to prevent malaria. In addition, health officials recommend taking measures to prevent mosquito bites. Outbreak News Today

Ethiopia: Thousands hit by outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea during worst drought for decades

24 April - An important outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea is sweeping through Doolo zone, in Ethiopia's Somali region, exacerbated by one of the worst droughts in 30 years. In response, teams from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) are working alongside Ethiopian health authorities to bring the outbreak under control, while warning that more external funding and resources are urgently needed to stop the disease from spreading further. Officially declared on 7 April, the outbreak has affected more than 16,000 people in the whole region since the start of the year, with about 3,500 new cases per month, according to local authorities. The government has so far deployed over 1,200 health professionals, including nurses and doctors, and set up 100 centres to treat people with the disease. Even if an overall decline in acute watery diarrhoea numbers is registered in the region, the risk of re-infection remains high. Medecins Sans Frontières
Liberia: Ebola ruled out in unexplained Liberian deaths

26 April - Health officials in Liberia are investigating the unexplained deaths of nine people who attended a funeral-related event, but tests are negative for the Ebola virus. ... In Facebook posts, Umaru Fofana, a Reuters correspondent based in Sierra Leone, said an unusual number of deaths are linked to the death of an 11-year-old girl who became ill with symptoms including diarrhea and vomiting over the weekend after attending a funeral of a religious leader ... in southeastern Liberia. Fofana said the United Nations has issued a precaution to its staff in Liberia regarding an unusual number of deaths at the FJ Grante Hospital, where the patients died. ... Tarik Jasarevic, a spokesman with the World Health Organization (WHO) told CIDRAP News that, according to the latest information, there are 17 illnesses in the cluster, 9 of them fatal. Eight people are still in the hospital. CIDRAP

Niger: Hepatitis E outbreak highlights need for better water and sanitation conditions among displaced people

26 April - The current outbreak of hepatitis E in Diffa, Niger declared by the Nigerien authorities last week highlights the poor water and sanitation conditions in which the vast majority of the displaced people and refugees in the region are living. ... From December 2016 to last Sunday, 135 cases of jaundice—one of the most common symptoms of hepatitis E—have been detected in Diffa. Many of these cases were pregnant women who needed to be admitted to the main maternal and pediatric health center, where [Médecins Sans Frontières] is working with the Ministry of Health. Of these pregnant women, 25 died due to acute liver failure. There is no treatment for acute hepatitis E, which is especially deadly in pregnant women. ReliefWeb

Nigeria: Meningitis outbreak nears 10,000 cases

26 April - In a follow-up on the meningitis outbreak in Nigeria which started in December 2016, the Nigerian CDC reports 9,646 suspected cases, of which 277 (2.9%) were laboratory confirmed. Nearly 9 percent or 839 deaths were recorded as of Apr. 22. In the last four weeks, 43 Local Government Areas (LGAs) have reached alert/epidemic threshold in seven States. ... Neisseria meningitidis serotype C. was the common cause of meningitis amongst those who tested positive. Nearly half the cases were in children ages 5-14. Outbreak News Today

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Saudi Arabia/Qatar: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

27 April - ... Between 18 March and 20 April 2017, 13 cases of MERS were reported in Saudi
Arabia. Six of these cases had exposure to infected dromedary camels or consumed their raw milk, which is the most likely source of their infection and two cases were detected through contact tracing of previously reported MERS-CoV cases. ... On 18 April 2017, one case of MERS was reported in Qatar. The 25-year-old case has a history of frequent contact with dromedary camels and no history of exposure to other known risk factors in the 14 days prior to the onset of symptoms. He is currently in stable condition admitted to a negative pressure isolation room on a ward. The department of health protection and communicable disease control in the Ministry of Public Health has carried out case investigation and contact tracing. All contacts have tested negative but will continue to be monitored until the end of the monitoring period of 14 days of last exposure to the case.

WHO

Syria: Air strikes kill at least 12, damage hospital in Syria's Idlib: medics, monitor

25 April - Syrian or Russian air strikes killed more than a dozen people and severely damaged a hospital in and around a town in rebel-held Idlib province on Tuesday, local medical workers and a monitoring group said. ... Idlib is an insurgent stronghold, one of the few large areas still under rebel control in the west of the country. ... A spokesman at the hospital in Kafr Takharim in Idlib told Reuters an air strike hit its courtyard killing 14 people, including patients. The Observatory said there were no deaths from the hospital strike, but that the bombardment had put it out of action. Reuters

United Arab Emirates: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

24 April - Between 9 and 11 April 2017, the National IHR Focal Point of United Arab Emirates (UAE) reported two additional cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). The two cases identified in Abu Dhabi, UAE, were roommates. The case reported to WHO on 9 April 2017 (31-year-old) passed away on 16 April 2017 and the second case reported to WHO on 11 April 2017, identified through tracing of household contacts, is asymptomatic and has been admitted to a negative pressure isolation room on a ward in hospital. The source of infection of the 31-year-old MERS case is under investigation. Contact tracing of household and healthcare contacts is ongoing. ... To date, United Arab Emirates has reported 81 laboratory confirmed cases of MERS. The last case was reported in June 2016. WHO

Yemen: Gulf states must donate to avert famine in Yemen: U.N.

24 April - The top United Nations humanitarian official called on Monday for Gulf countries to help avert mass starvation in Yemen, where two years of war have left millions at risk of famine. Stephen O'Brien, U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator, spoke in an interview a day ahead of a major conference where the U.N. is seeking $2.1 billion for Yemen this year. The
world body has received only 15 percent toward that appeal, none of it from regional
countries, U.N. records show. ... Some 17 million of Yemen’s 26 million people lack sufficient
food and at least three million malnourished children are in "grave peril", O’Brien said.

Reuters

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Europe: European studies note high impact, spread of
C difficile

24 April - ... In a study conducted in Scotland, researchers identified 3,304 patients
hospitalized with CDI from August 2010 to July 2013 and matched them to a control group
of 9,516 patients who did not have [Clostridium difficile infection (CDI)]. ... The results
showed that within 2 months of hospital admission, nearly a third of all CDI patients (29%)
died, compared with 14% of the control group, and that the risk of dying of any cause was
more than double in the CDI patients relative to the control group. In addition, CDI patients
stayed in the hospital on average 9.7 days longer than patients without CDI. The researchers
also found that of the 2,740 patients who survived the initial episode of CDI, 14% had a
recurrence within 90 days; among the 371 who survived recurrence, 29% had a second
recurrence. ... [Another study] compared the impact of recurrent CDI infection among 6,874
patients treated at English hospitals for CDI from 2002 through 2013. Their study found that
of the 1,141 (16.6%) patients who suffered a recurrent episode, 49% died within a year,
compared with 38% of patients who had an initial CDI infection only. CIDRAP

Europe: Hepatitis E and blood donation safety in
selected European countries - a shift to screening?

20 April - The public health implications of hepatitis E virus (HEV) in Europe have changed
due to increasing numbers of hepatitis E cases and recent reports of chronic, persistent HEV
infections associated with progression to cirrhosis in immunosuppressed patients. ... In
response to the threat posed by HEV and related public and political concerns, most of the
observed countries determined seroprevalence of HEV in donors and presence of HEV RNA
in blood donations. France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom (UK) reported cases of
transfusion-transmitted HEV. Ireland and the UK have already implemented HEV RNA
screening of blood donations; the Netherlands will start in 2017. Germany and France
perform screening for HEV RNA in several blood establishments or plasma donations
intended for use in high-risk patients respectively and, with Switzerland, are considering
implementing selective or universal screening nationwide. In Greece, Portugal, Italy and
Spain, the blood authorities are evaluating the situation. Denmark decided not to
implement the HEV screening of blood donations. Eurosurveillance
Europe: Vaccination gaps lead to dangerous measles outbreaks in Europe – ECDC

24 April - Gaps in vaccination coverage against measles have led to several outbreaks of the highly-contagious disease in Europe in the past year, with both children and young adults affected, health officials said on Monday. During the first two months of 2017, more than 1,500 measles cases were reported from 14 European countries due to "an accumulation of unvaccinated individuals", said officials from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). In 10 countries -- Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden -- the number of cases reported in January-February 2017 was more than double that of the first two months of 2016. Reuters

USNORTHCOM

Mexico: Trachoma - Blinding neglected tropical disease eliminated in Mexico

24 April - Trachoma has been eliminated as a public health problem in Mexico, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced today. Mexico becomes the first country in the Americas and the third in the world after Oman and Morocco to receive validation from WHO for having eliminated this disease. Outbreak News Today

U.S.: Fatal malaria in the U.S. more common than previously known

24 April - Serious and fatal bouts of malaria in the United States are a greater problem than has been previously reported, according to a new study. Most appear to be in immigrants who have made summer or Christmas visits to their home countries without taking precautions against infection. The typical victim appears to be a man ranging in age from 20 to 50 who is from Africa or the Caribbean, said the lead author, Diana Khuu, an epidemiologist at the Fielding School of Public Health at the University of California, Los Angeles. But among the hospitalized women, an unusually high number — 14 percent — were pregnant. Because pregnancy lowers immune defenses, malaria can be lethal to both mother and fetus. ... [T]he authors suspect that many of the victims grew up in malarial areas, developed immunity in childhood from repeated infections, and then did not realize that their childhood immunity had disappeared after years in the United States. The New York Times
U.S.: Hispanic men often put off medical care, bringing bigger trouble

22 April - ... For reasons both economic and cultural, Hispanic men are loath to interact with the health system. Women across all races are more likely to seek care than men. ... Studies show that Latino men are much less likely than Latinas to get treatment. That is true even though Hispanic men are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be obese, have diabetes or have high blood pressure. Those who drink tend to do so heavily, contributing to the group’s higher rates of alcoholic cirrhosis and deaths from chronic liver disease. Many take risky jobs such as construction workers and laborers, and are more likely to die from on-the-job injuries than other workers, government data show. ... Some care providers say medical institutions haven’t done enough to keep Hispanic men healthy, or to persuade them to get regular exams. NPR

U.S.: Surgeon general is removed by Trump administration, replaced by deputy for now

22 April - U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy has been removed by the Trump administration and replaced temporarily by his deputy, Rear Adm. Sylvia Trent-Adams. Murthy, a holdover from the Obama administration, was asked to resign, according to a statement released Friday night by the Department of Health and Human Services. The statement said that “after assisting in a smooth transition into the new Trump administration,” Murthy “has been relieved of his duties.” Trent-Adams, a 24-year veteran of the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and a former chief nurse officer of the Public Health Service, will fill the role for now, the statement said. The Washington Post

U.S.: The FDA cracks down on companies pushing vegetable extracts and creams as cancer cures

25 April - Asparagus extract. Exotic teas. Topical creams for your pet -- and you. These and dozens of other products are being touted falsely as having "anti-cancer" properties, according to federal regulators who are trying to stop the practice. The Food and Drug Administration, in warning letters released Tuesday, ordered 14 companies to stop making the bogus claims or face possible seizures of their products and criminal prosecution. The letters covered more than five dozen unapproved products that the companies said could prevent, treat or cure cancer, the FDA said. The items included pills, ointments, oils, drops, teas and diagnostic devices. The Washington Post

U.S.: Will climate change help ticks and mosquitoes spread disease?

21 April - ... [Ticks] have spread northward all the way to Maine in New England and Minnesota in the Midwest. ... Climate change is likely to make Lyme disease more common in the U.S. The ticks are creeping northward and starting to bite people earlier in the year.
[But] if climate change brings drier springs, we might actually see a decline in tick activity in some places. ... [W]armer weather doesn't necessarily mean a greater chance of mosquitoes spreading more dengue, more yellow fever and more Zika. ... At cooler temperatures, the pathogen [that infects the mosquito] will take too long to mature. The mosquito will be dead before it has a chance to infect another person. At high temperatures, the pathogen will mature quickly but the mosquito will also die quickly. ... [H]ere in the U.S., warmer springs and summers are likely to make transmission worse in the South and possibly cause diseases to creep northward. NPR

USPACOM

China: Hong Kong reports increase in scarlet fever in March

27 April - The Hong Kong Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health reported increased scarlet fever activity in March 2017 as compared with that in February. 249 cases of scarlet fever were reported in March as compared with 168 cases in February. There were 13 institutional clusters occurring in ten kindergartens and three primary schools, affecting a total of 34 children. No fatal cases were reported in March. Outbreak News Today

India: E.coli found in 72% of ice samples - BMC survey

27 April – [In Mumbai, a] civic public health department’s survey has found that ice served at hundreds of hawkers and restaurants across the city is contaminated with E.coli microbes. "We conducted a survey in March and April and found that 67% and 72% ice samples respectively were contaminated," said Dr Padmaja Keskar, civic executive health officer. The only silver lining is that a similar survey conducted just before last year’s monsoon found that 92% of the ice samples were contaminated. During last year’s survey, a total of 948 samples of ice were collected from across the city, of which 870-or 92 %-were found contaminated. The samples were picked up from ice sellers, hotels, bars, juice stalls, dairies, sweetmeat shops, ice-gola vendors and fast food outlets among others. The Times of India
Brazil: With yellow fever reaching Rio, official says Brazil prepared

24 April - With the first case of yellow fever (YF) confirmed late last week in the Rio de Janeiro metro area and cases in several Brazilian states spreading closer to cities, an official from the country’s ministry of health says authorities are prepared for a potential explosion of the virus in Brazil’s densely populated urban centers, but much of the population lacks coverage. A 61-year-old man in Marica, which is about 30 miles east of downtown Rio, died on Apr 19, and the state health department confirmed that he had contracted the mosquito-borne disease. ... His is the 11th case in the state of Rio de Janeiro and the third death, the story said. ... Akira Homma, MD, a senior scientific adviser at Bio-Manguinhos, Fiocruz, which is responsible for developing and producing vaccines in Brazil, said the country is currently able to keep up with demand for YF vaccine. ... Thomas Monath, MD, chief scientific and chief operating officer of BioProtection Systems/NewLink Genetics Corp, said the current YF outbreak in Brazil is the biggest jungle outbreak of the disease since the mid-1970s. Because the country has largely avoided YF outbreaks in the past 40 years, the vaccination coverage in the general population is spotty. CIDRAP

Latin America/Caribbean: Obesity "frightening" in Latin America, driving disease and draining economies - U.N.

25 April - More than two thirds of people living in Chile, Ecuador and Mexico are overweight or obese, costing their economies tens of billions of dollars every year, driving rates of disease and straining health services, a U.N. report said on Tuesday. While the number of hungry people in Latin America and the Caribbean has halved in the last 25 years, the region is now struggling to combat an obesity epidemic. ... In Mexico ... 74 percent of women are obese or overweight compared with 70 percent of men. ... The report noted Chile’s efforts to combat obesity, including an 18 percent tax on sugary drinks introduced in 2014 - one of the world's highest - along with laws that restrict the advertising of unhealthy foods targeting children. In 2014, Mexico also introduced a 10 percent tax on fizzy drinks, and 2016 research by the British Medical Journal found that the sugar tax led to a 12 percent reduction in sales during the first year it was implemented. Thomson Reuters Foundation
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