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Biosafety reforms still lagging at military labs

20 September - Three years after discovering that a military laboratory had shipped live anthrax to facilities around the world, the Department of Defense still has not developed a plan to evaluate its biological security practices, the federal Government Accountability Office reported on Thursday. The department has implemented about half of the procedural changes that had been recommended, the G.A.O. said. But the Pentagon still has not established a way to measure the effectiveness of these reforms, making it difficult for experts to determine whether safety has improved. The New York Times

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He blew up a chlorine gas bomb beside an Army base — and left a fellow soldier severely wounded

24 September - Sgt. Joshua Farbro walked into the ring of rapidly yellowing vegetation to investigate the booms echoing through Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana. Other soldiers reported a staccato of noises and a cloud of smoke that rose above the tree line just outside Fort Polk. Farbro arrived and collected rocks coated with an unknown substance at the center of a 30-foot radius reeking of chlorine. His latex gloves began to melt ... and acid tore into his esophagus and lungs. He passed out at one point, and was rushed to a hospital. Authorities later detained Spc. Ryan Keith Taylor, a 24-year-old soldier assigned to Fort Polk, in the April 2017 incident. In June, after first pleading innocent, Taylor pleaded guilty to manufacturing and detonation of a chemical weapon. ... The chemical was identified as chlorine gas. Farbro testified in federal court in Lafayette on Monday before Taylor was sentenced to 135 months in prison, or slightly more than 11 years.
Stars and Stripes

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Military parents outraged after mold found in base school damaged by Florence

25 September - Students at Brewster Middle School on Marine Corps Camp Lejeune, North Carolina returned to classes today despite water damage and mold that is now making them sick, according to parents who spoke with Military.com. Brewster Middle School sustained extensive water damage from Hurricane Florence, the parents said, with a power outage that lasted nine days. ... But when some parents visited the school to look at conditions, they found molding tiles and vents, buckled floors and small bugs in an area used by special needs students. Military Times

Sexual assault: Here are the bases where troops are most at risk

21 September - Men and women assigned to Navy ships at sea are far more likely to be sexually assaulted than service members at bases elsewhere across the force, according to a new Defense Department report. Across the services, the safest places to work were at the Pentagon or other national capital region headquarters buildings. ... The Pentagon released the data on Friday as part of a much-anticipated report that for the first time looks at the likelihood of sexual assault on a military installation or ship and ranks them by service. The rankings were commissioned by the Defense Department and aim to help military officials to better identify the risk factors for sexual assault and how to most effectively deploy prevention and response efforts. ... Fort Drum in upstate New York was one of the most dangerous places for both Army men and women in terms of risk of sexual assault. ... For Army women, the top five locations in terms of risk of sexual assault included Fort Huachuca, Arizona; Osan Air Base, Korea; Fort Drum; Okinawa, Japan; and Fort Riley, Kansas. For men, the top five locations with the highest risk were located in Italy; at Fort Myer, Virginia; Fort Benning, Georgia; Fort Drum; and Rose Barracks, Germany. "While the lowest-risk installations for men are dominated by small, command or support installations, the highest-risk list includes many installations with a more prominent combat unit presence," the study found. Military Times

VA: Suicide rate for younger veterans increased by more than 10 percent

26 September - The suicide rate among all veterans decreased slightly but the rate among young veterans increased dramatically in the latest figures released by the Department of Veterans Affairs on Wednesday. ... According to the report, the suicide rate of veterans aged 18 to 34 steadily increased from 2006 to 2016, with a jump of more than 10 percent from 2015 to 2016. That translates into 45 deaths per 100,000 veterans, the highest of any age group. But since the majority of veterans are older, the majority of suicides are also among older veterans. Nearly 60 percent of veterans suicide in 2016 were from individuals 55 or
GLOBAL

Building a better mosquito trap — one scientist thinks he's done it

25 September - A scientist in Australia has come up with an insecticide-free way to control a particularly pesky species of mosquito. The approach involves ... deploying a decidedly low-tech mosquito trap called a GAT. ... GAT stands for Gravid Aedes Trap. Aedes is short for Aedes albopictus, known colloquially as the Asian tiger mosquito, which bites aggressively night and day. The trap [is] basically three plastic buckets stacked together. ... The mosquitoes fly into the trap through a hole in the top bucket, but they seem to have a hard time flying back out through the hole. ... The bottom bucket contains water with some rotting grass floating in it. Aedes mosquitoes typically lay their eggs in stagnant water. The middle bucket has a net to trap any mosquitoes that hatch in the water. NPR

Enterotoxigenic E. coli research to be used in an effort to develop a preventive vaccine for travelers

25 September - Every year, millions of people have vacations and business trips ruined when they succumb to “traveler’s diarrhea” during their journeys. A major cause of traveler’s diarrhea is bacteria called Enterotoxigenic E. coli, or ETEC. A joint effort between the University of Georgia and the University of Texas at Austin has discovered how ETEC works to cause disease. They are using this information in an effort to develop a preventive vaccine for travelers. Outbreak News Today

Gene tweak kills whole population of malaria-carrying mosquitoes in lab

25 September - Scientists have killed a whole population of malaria-carrying mosquitoes in their lab by using modified genes that make the killer insects infertile. Researchers at London’s Imperial College used “gene drive” technology to spread a genetic modification that blocks female reproduction while letting male mosquitoes continue to spread those altered genes. The results ... represent the first time gene drive has completely suppressed a population. ... The team crashed populations of the Anopheles gambiae mosquito, which transmits malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. USA Today
Infant dietary exposures to environmental chemicals and infant/child health: A critical assessment of the literature

26 September - ... Are infant exposures to background levels of environmental chemicals in breast milk and formula associated with adverse health effects? ... The available literature does not provide conclusive evidence of consistent or clinically relevant health consequences to infants exposed to environmental chemicals in breast milk at background levels. It is clear that more research would better inform our understanding of the potential for health impacts from infant dietary exposures to environmental chemicals. EHP

Morbidity and mortality due to *shigella* and enterotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* diarrhoea: the Global Burden of Disease Study 1990–2016

25 September - *Shigella* and enterotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* (ETEC) are bacterial pathogens that are frequently associated with diarrhoeal disease, and are a significant cause of mortality and morbidity worldwide. ... *Shigella* was responsible for an estimated 212,438 deaths globally among all ages in 2016, which accounts for roughly 13·2% of all diarrhoea deaths. *Shigella* was the second leading cause of diarrhoea mortality in 2016 among all ages. ... ETEC was the eighth leading cause of diarrhoea mortality in 2016 among all age groups globally, accounting for an estimated 51,186 deaths; about 3·2% of all diarrhoea deaths were attributable to ETEC. The Lancet

Paralyzed people are beginning to walk with a device surgically implanted on their spinal cords and months of physical therapy

24 September – ... In a research study at the University of Louisville, [Kelly] Thomas and three others had a device surgically implanted on their spinal cords to stimulate electrical activity, accompanied by months of daily physical therapy. In the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers from the University of Louisville reported that two of the subjects could stand and take limited steps at the end of the study, and two were able to walk independently — Thomas and another patient, Jeff Marquis. ... A simultaneous case report published in Nature Medicine reported that a single patient with a spinal cord injury at the Mayo Clinic was also able to take steps and walk with trainer assistance with electrical stimulation and intensive physical therapy. The Washington Post

Scientists create immature human eggs from stem cells

20 September - Scientists say they have taken a potentially important — and possibly controversial — step toward creating human eggs in a lab dish. A team of Japanese
scientists turned human blood cells into stem cells, which they then transformed into very immature human eggs. The eggs are far too immature to be fertilized or make a baby. And much more research would be needed to create eggs that could be useful — and safe — for human reproduction. But the work, reported Thursday in the journal Science, is seen by other scientists as an important development. ... The technique might someday help millions of people suffering from infertility because of cancer treatments or other reasons, Clark says. But the prospect of being able to mass-produce human eggs in labs raises a host of societal and ethical issues. 

INFLUENZA

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

2017–2018 Influenza Season Week 37 ending September 15, 2018
Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) Mortality Surveillance: Based on National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) mortality surveillance data available on September 20, 2018, 5.0% of the deaths occurring during the week ending September 1, 2018 (week 35) were due to P&I. This percentage is below the epidemic threshold of 5.8% for week 35. 

Flu season last winter killed the most people since the 1970s, CDC says

26 September - Tens of thousands of American deaths last winter are believed to have been caused by the flu and its related complications, officials said Tuesday, making it the most severe season in at least four decades. "We lost 80,000 people last year to the flu," Dr. Robert Redfield, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), told The Associated Press on Tuesday. The number is thought to be the highest death toll for the flu since the winter of 1976-77.

Influenza vaccination coverage among health care personnel — United States, 2017–18 influenza season

28 September - Annual influenza vaccination is recommended for health care personnel to reduce influenza-related morbidity and mortality. Opt-in Internet panel survey-assessed influenza vaccination coverage among health care personnel during the 2017–18 season was 78.4%, similar to the previous four seasons. Employer vaccination requirements and offering/promoting workplace vaccination were associated with higher coverage; coverage was lowest among long-term care setting personnel, who were least likely to report
NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

20 September - Febrile respiratory illness cases:
- Military Recruits - 15 positive of 35 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance – 5 positive of 6 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 11 positive of 32 tested. Naval Health Research Center

Study: Classroom flu transmission may fall with higher humidity

26 September - A study yesterday in PLoS One shows that raising a room’s humidity levels could be a non-pharmaceutical intervention (NPI) for reducing the transmission of influenza A. Mayo Clinic researchers conducted the study at a preschool in Rochester, Minn., from January to March of 2016. They used identical classrooms with separate heating/air conditioning systems, raising humidity to an average of 9.89 mb in test rooms compared with 6.33 mb in control rooms. The difference between the two rooms represented a relative humidity increase of 42% to 45%. The researchers collected a total of 650 samples from the rooms (320 in control rooms, 330 in humidified rooms) of which 112 (17%) were positive for influenza A. The authors said there were fewer samples positive for influenza A virus in humidified rooms compared with control rooms for both fomites and for total air.

CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Are emotional support animals necessary or just glorified pets?

26 September - ... No government agency oversees service animals, much less emotional support animals. ... [L]et’s clear the air about emotional support animals versus service animals.

Difference #1: What they do. The difference can be summed up this way: Service animals do, while emotional support animals are. In other words, service animals perform specific tasks.

... By contrast, emotional support animals help simply by being there.

Difference #2: Who they are. A trained service animal can only be a dog or a miniature horse. ... By contrast, any kind of critter—bird, bunny, hedgehog—could be an emotional
support animal, so long as it serves a therapeutic purpose for its owner.
Difference #3: Where they can go. ... In contrast to service animals, who can go pretty much anywhere under the Americans with Disabilities Act, emotional support animals can only legally accompany their owners in two places: in their owners’ homes and on airplanes. ... [D]oes anything separate an emotional support animal from a beloved pet? The research is still inconclusive: according to a 2016 study in *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, it’s unclear whether emotional support animals actually provide a therapeutic effect, or just create general positive effect characteristic of all animals. *Scientific American*

China says new African swine fever outbreak reported in Inner Mongolia

24 September - China said on Monday it has confirmed a new outbreak of African swine fever in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of northern China, as authorities struggle to contain the highly contagious disease. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said a slaughterhouse in the city of Hohhot reported the outbreak, adding that four pigs were infected with, and two had died from, African swine fever. The world’s top pork producer has seen a steady stream of new outbreaks since the first case was reported in early August. *Reuters*

FDA proposes expanding retailer information in certain food recalls

26 September - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) today released new draft guidance that spells out when it’s appropriate to disclose retail information for recalled products. In a statement, Scott Gottlieb, MD, FDA commissioner, said the agency hasn’t typically released lists of retailers where recalled food was sold, because certain supply chain information between suppliers and retailers is confidential. ... The new guidance ... specified that the FDA may disclose retail lists in certain recall situations, including when the food is related to a foodborne illness outbreak and when the information is most useful to consumers. *CIDRAP News Scan* (first item)

No-deal Brexit may strain UK animal health check system, slow exports

24 September - Britain’s system for inspecting live animals destined for export could be strained by a surge in requests and a possible shortage of veterinarians if it leaves the European Union without a deal, the government said on Monday. In a paper outlining the scenario, the government said Britain would have to begin issuing health certificates to animals headed to the EU if no deal is reached on the terms of Britain’s exit, set for March 29, 2019. These certificates, which are signed by a veterinarian or authorized signatory, prove the animal complies with the quality and health standards of the destination country.
Currently, they are only issued for exports to countries outside the EU. Reuters

She gave medicine to pets she rescued from Hurricane Florence. She was arrested for it.

24 September - As Hurricane Florence barreled toward the North Carolina coast, Tammie Hedges decided to open a warehouse she had been remodeling to house pets displaced by the storm. The animals came from the streets, where volunteers found them, and from owners who had to evacuate but couldn't bring their pets with them. ... Twenty-seven animals — 17 cats and 10 dogs — were in Hedges's care as the storm pummeled the state. But while many saw her actions as an act of goodwill to help animals during a natural disaster, county officials saw a violation of the law. They arrested and charged Hedges [with] a dozen misdemeanor charges and accused of practicing veterinary medicine without a license. The Washington Post

Traceback and packaging questions raised over Cargill’s ground beef recall

27 September - A week after Cargill Meat Solutions recall of 66 tons of ground beef, some concerns remain. Experts at Consumer Reports suggest tossing out any ground beef in your freezer purchased between June 21 and July 11 of this year "out of an abundance of caution." And a top food safety advocate in Congress, Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-CT, is demanding more information from the USDA about the associated outbreak of E. coli O26, which has caused 18 illnesses and one death. ... DeLauro wrote, "According to the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), the agency was notified of an investigation of E. coli O26 illnesses on Aug. 16, 2018. However, it was not until Aug. 30, 2018, that the first recall related to this outbreak was initiated by Publix Super Markets Inc." Food Safety News

Veterans struggling after sexual assault increasingly turn to service dogs.

22 September - ... Service dog providers are seeing an influx of applications from veterans ... who have experienced sexual trauma while in the military. But the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which provides veterinary benefits for service dogs assigned to people with physical disabilities, does not currently recognize psychiatric service dogs as a proven therapy for mental illness. ... Psychiatry and medication are frequently prescribed therapies to help veterans combat many of military sexual trauma’s lasting effects. And now, some veterans are using psychiatric service dogs as a tool to supplement traditional recovery methods. ... Christopher Baity, who runs Semper K9 ... says there are a lot of similarities between veterans who have experienced MST and veterans who have combat-related PTSD: agoraphobia and antisocial behavior, for instance. Baity conducts the same dog training for both. NPR
Addiction could stem from ancient retrovirus, study suggests

25 September - An ancient retrovirus that predates modern humans may explain why people suffer from addiction, scientists have said. Researchers studied drug users in two cities and found they were up to about three times more likely than the general population to have remnants of the HK2 virus within a particular gene in their DNA. The virus dates back at least to Neanderthals and is present in the RASGRF2 gene -- which a researcher called the "pleasure gene" because it increases the activity of dopamine in the brain -- in about 5% to 10% of people. That proportion of the population could therefore be more disposed to addictive behavior, the scientists said. CNN

Amarin fish oil capsule shows dramatic benefit for cardiovascular patients, potentially upending market

24 September - The biopharma company Amarin is making some heart-medicine history Monday with its proprietary, prescription formulation of fish oil, called Vascepa. In a stunning clinical trial result that upends years of skepticism about the long-term heart benefit of products containing omega-3 fatty acids, Amarin’s Vascepa significantly reduced the risk of deaths, heart attacks, strokes, and other serious cardiovascular events compared to a placebo. Amarin designed its cardiovascular outcomes study, known as REDUCE-IT, hoping to show Vascepa could meet the primary endpoint with a 15 percent risk reduction. The result announced Monday: a 25 percent risk reduction — highly statistically significant. STAT

Are we wired to sit?

26 September - Are we born to be physically lazy? A sophisticated if disconcerting new neurological study suggests that we probably are. It finds that even when people know that exercise is desirable and plan to work out, certain electrical signals within their brains may be nudging them toward being sedentary. ... In alternating portions of the test, the volunteers were told to move their avatars as rapidly as possible toward the active images and away from the sedentary ones, and then vice versa. This test is known as an "approach-avoidance task" and is thought to be a reliable indicator of how people consciously feel about whatever is depicted on the screen. If people respond more avidly to one kind of image, moving their avatars to it more quickly than they move them away from other types of images, presumably they are drawn to that subject. And the volunteers in this study were almost uniformly quicker to move toward the active images than the sedentary ones and slower to avoid those same active stick figures. They all consciously preferred the figures that were in motion. The New York Times
Combination HIV antibody infusions safely maintain viral suppression in select individuals

26 September - A small group of people living with HIV sensitive to two potent anti-HIV broadly neutralizing antibodies - 3BNC117 and 10-1074 - tolerated multiple infusions of the antibodies and suppressed HIV for more than 15 weeks after stopping antiretroviral therapy (ART). ... "A safe, reliable, antibody-based treatment regimen would open new possibilities for people living with HIV," said Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of NIH. "This study represents an important, early step towards that goal and, importantly, helps establish that a combination of broadly neutralizing antibodies to HIV can safely suppress the virus in certain individuals without the apparent development of viral resistance." NIH

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Harmful use of alcohol kills more than 3 million people each year, most of them men

21 September - More than 3 million people died as a result of harmful use of alcohol in 2016, according a report released by the World Health Organization (WHO) today. This represents 1 in 20 deaths. More than three quarters of these deaths were among men. Overall, the harmful use of alcohol causes more than 5% of the global disease burden. WHO's Global status report on alcohol and health 2018 presents a comprehensive picture of alcohol consumption and the disease burden attributable to alcohol worldwide. It also describes what countries are doing to reduce this burden. WHO

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In rare bipartisan accord, House and Senate reach compromise on opioid bill

26 September - The House and Senate have reached agreement on a big package of measures to address the opioid epidemic. The legislation, backed by leaders of both parties, is a rare bipartisan achievement that lawmakers are eager to have in hand when they go home to campaign for the midterm elections. The 653-page bill contains a mix of law enforcement and public health measures, including one that aims to block deadly fentanyl from being imported through the mail and one that will allow more nurses to prescribe medication for opioid addiction. Another provision could make it easier for Medicaid recipients to get inpatient care for substance abuse over the next five years. The New York Times

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Juul copycats flood e-cig market, despite FDA rule

24 September - The sleek Juul electronic cigarettes have become a phenomenon at U.S. high schools, vexing educators and drawing regulatory scrutiny over their sweet flavors and high nicotine content. Now, a new wave of lower-priced Juul knock-offs is showing up at
convenience stores, vape shops and online - despite a U.S. Food and Drug Administration rule banning the sale of new e-cigarette products after August 2016 without regulatory approval. Start-ups and major tobacco firms have launched more than a dozen new high-nicotine devices with Juul-like designs since the FDA imposed the deadline, according to a Reuters review of the companies’ online advertisements, social media posts and public statements.

Ketamine gives hope to patients with severe depression. But some clinics stray from the science and hype its benefits

24 September - ... An investigation by STAT shows that ... sweeping claims are hardly uncommon in the booming ketamine treatment business. Dozens of free-standing clinics have opened across the U.S. in recent years to provide the drug to patients who are desperate for an effective therapy and hopeful ketamine can help. But the investigation found wide-ranging inconsistencies among clinics, from the screening of patients to the dose and frequency of infusions to the coordination with patients’ mental health providers. A number of clinics stray from recommendations issued last year by the American Psychiatric Association.

Newborn syphilis cases more than double in four years, reaching 20-year high

25 September - Reported cases of congenital syphilis – syphilis passed from a mother to her baby during pregnancy or delivery – have more than doubled since 2013, according to the annual Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance Report released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The data underscore the need for all pregnant women to receive early prenatal care that includes syphilis testing at their first visit, and follow-up testing for women at high risk of infection. Reported cases jumped from 362 in 2013 to 918 in 2017 – the highest number of recorded cases in 20 years. Cases were reported in 37 states – primarily Western and Southern states.

The end of HIV transmission in the U.S.: A once-unthinkable dream becomes an openly discussed goal

26 September - ... U.S. health officials and HIV experts are beginning to talk about a future in which transmission in the United States could be halted. And that future, they say, could come not within a generation, but in the span of just a few years. "We have the science to solve the AIDS epidemic," Dr. Robert Redfield, the director of the CDC, himself a longtime HIV researcher and clinician, told STAT in a recent interview. ... Other leaders in the HIV field have been musing about the idea, buoyed by the astonishing impact effective HIV
medications have wrought, both on the lives of people infected with or at risk of contracting the virus, and on the trajectory of the epidemic. STAT

Video-conferencing brings therapists to patients with anxiety

25 September - Talk therapy for anxiety disorders can be effective even when done via video-conference, a new study confirms. ... For the new analysis, researchers reviewed 21 earlier studies on delivery of psychological counseling for anxiety disorders via video conference, including six gold-standard randomized trials that compared video therapy to traditional face-to-face therapy. Ten of the studies were conducted in the U.S., five in Canada and six in Australia. Fourteen of the studies reported statistically significant improvements in anxiety and 11 reported clinically significant improvements, meaning the improvements made a difference in patients’ daily lives. Four of the six gold-standard trials found statistically significant improvements with video therapy, and five of the six found clinically significant improvements. Reuters

Democratic Republic of Congo: Ebola response resumes in Beni, but protests spread to Butembo

26 September - Ebola response activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC's) hot spot in Beni started again slowly today. ... [O]ne new Ebola infection was confirmed in Beni, and researchers reported on adverse events following vaccination with VSV-EBOV—which were mild to moderate and of short duration. ... [I]n Butembo, a pressure group called La Veranda Mutsanga declared a multi-day protest ... which slowed down field activities in the urban area, where 8 cases have been reported, 6 of them confirmed. The DRC's update yesterday reported one new case, a patient from Beni, raising the outbreak total to 151 cases, 120 of them confirmed. One more death was reported, also involving a resident of Beni. CIDRAP News

Democratic Republic of Congo: WHO extremely concerned about Ebola 'perfect storm' in Congo

25 September - The World Health Organization said on Tuesday that an Ebola outbreak in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo could worsen rapidly because of attacks by armed groups, community resistance and the geographic spread of the disease. “We are now extremely concerned that several factors may be coming together over the next weeks and months to create a potential perfect storm,” WHO's head of emergency response Peter
Salama told a news conference in Geneva. … [T]he weekly number of new cases has fallen from about 40 to about 10 in the past few weeks and more than 11,700 people have been vaccinated. … Attacks by armed opposition groups had increased in severity and frequency, especially those attributed to the Alliance of Democratic Forces, most dramatically an attack that killed 21 in the city of Beni, where WHO’s operation is based. Reuters

Libya: Half a million children in immediate danger in Tripoli

23 September - “We are shocked and saddened by reports that an entire family killed including two children today in Tripoli when a missile hit their home. This brings the total number of children killed to eight, since violence escalated in Tripoli on 27 August. … A shortage of food water and electricity is among the daily challenges facing children and families. The country is facing an outbreak of measles, with over 500 cases reported – most of which are among children. A growing lack of fully functioning health services will only result in more cases of measles.” ReliefWeb

Nigeria: Nigeria reports suspected monkeypox cases tied to UK illness

24 September - The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) said today that six suspected monkeypox cases are associated with one of the recent monkeypox illnesses in England, in a report that noted two new confirmed cases in the same Nigerian state as the suspected cases. … Public Health England confirmed the UK’s first monkeypox case on Sep 7, and a second, unrelated case on Sep 11. Both cases involved men who had been in Nigeria. … With the 2 new confirmed cases, Nigeria has now confirmed 115 monkeypox cases and listed 4 additional illnesses as probable cases since September 2017. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

Sudan: Sudan reports outbreak of mosquito-borne Chikungunya disease in eastern state

25 September - More than 11,000 people in Sudan’s eastern state of Kassala have been infected over the past month by Chikungunya, a debilitating mosquito-borne viral disease, but no deaths have been reported, a Sudanese official said on Tuesday. … The outbreak began in recent weeks when heavy rains pummeled the area, which led to the flooding of a major river in Kassala. Abu Moussa said his state had received health and technical aid from Sudan’s health ministry, but expressed concern over the spread of the virus and called for further help. Reuters
USCENTCOM

Afghanistan: Polio cases confirmed in Afghanistan

21 September - The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) today reported one new case of wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) in Afghanistan and two new cases of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The WPV1 case in Afghanistan is in Kandahar province in the Kandahar district. The patient had onset of paralysis on Aug 11, and the case raises the 2018 total to 14, the same number the country had in all of 2017. At this point last year, Afghanistan had confirmed only 6 WPV1 cases. CIDRAP News Scan

USEUCOM

Europe: Adolescents drink less, although levels of alcohol consumption are still dangerously high

26 September - A new WHO report published today, Adolescent alcohol-related behaviours: trends and inequalities in the WHO European Region, 2002–2014, provides new insights into data collected over 12 years on adolescent drinking. The report reveals that alcohol use has declined among adolescents in Europe. However, despite the reductions, levels of consumption remain dangerously high and this continues to be a major public health concern. WHO Europe

Greece: Greece’s biggest migrant camp is a mental health crisis, aid groups say

25 September - Aid groups are warning of a growing safety and mental health crisis in Greece’s largest migrant camp, a combustible place where violence, attempted suicide, untreated psychological trauma and unsanitary conditions are commonplace, even as the government takes steps to relieve dangerous overcrowding. At the camp, called Moria, which is on the island of Lesbos, “more than 8,500 people are crammed into a site which only has the capacity to host 3,100,” the International Rescue Committee [stated]. ... There is only one shower for every 84 people and one toilet for every 72 people, the report said, and “the sewage system is so overwhelmed that raw sewage has been known to reach the mattresses where children sleep.” ... Doctors Without Borders issued a statement describing a “severe deterioration of health and mental health” and “frequent violence in all its forms” in the
United Kingdom: Contaminated blood scandal: Inquiry 'must uncover truth'

24 September - Emotional testimonies from people infected with HIV and hepatitis have been heard at the start of the inquiry into the contaminated blood scandal. The public inquiry is looking at how thousands of NHS patients were given infected blood products during the 1970s and 1980s in what has been dubbed the worst-ever NHS treatment disaster. ... About 5,000 people with haemophilia and other bleeding disorders are believed to have been infected with HIV and hepatitis viruses over a period of more than 20 years - nearly 3,000 of them have since died. BBC News

United Kingdom: Life expectancy progress in UK 'stops for first time'

25 September - Life expectancy in the UK has stopped improving for the first time since 1982, when figures began. Women's life expectancy from birth remains 82.9 years and for men it is 79.2, the figures from the Office for National Statistics, for 2015-17, show. In some parts of the UK, life expectancy has even decreased. For men and women in Scotland and Wales, it declined by more than a month. Men in Northern Ireland have seen a similar fall. For women in Northern Ireland, and for men and women in England, life expectancy at birth is unchanged. BBC News

United Kingdom: Monkeypox surfaces in three cases the U.K.

26 September - ... Officials in the U.K. announced Wednesday that a health worker in Blackpool, in northwestern England, had contracted monkeypox, the third patient in the country to be infected with the rare virus in the past month. The health care worker was infected by a patient who was recently cared for at the hospital. Britain's first-ever case of monkeypox was reported on Sept. 8, in a man from Nigeria who had been at a naval base in Cornwall. Only three days later a second imported case was spotted, in a man who had also recently returned from travel in Nigeria. That second individual, who was not immediately recognized as a monkeypox patient, was initially cared for at Blackpool Victoria Hospital. During that time before diagnosis, a health worker became infected. STAT
United Kingdom: Obesity 'to be linked to more female cancers' than smoking

24 September - Obesity is set to overtake smoking as the biggest preventable cause of cancer in UK women by 2043, a Cancer Research UK report predicts. Currently, 12% of cancers in women are linked to smoking, and 7% to being overweight and obese. But with the number of smokers falling and obesity rates projected to rise, the charity estimates that gap will disappear in 25 years time. The figures assume that current trends will continue. Cancer Research UK’s projections calculate that by 2035, 10% of cancers in women (around 25,000 cases) could be related to smoking and 9% (around 23,000 cases) to carrying excess weight. And by 2043, if those trends continued, being overweight and obese could be linked to even more cases of cancer than smoking in women. BBC News

USINDOPACOM

India: Diphtheria death toll at Delhi hospital rises to 18

24 September - In a follow-up on a report last week, the Press Trust of India reports the death toll of children from diphtheria at a municipal hospital in north-west Delhi has risen to 18. “A total of 18 children have died at the civic hospital so far, 17 of the patients were from outside Delhi and only one belonged to Delhi,” a senior NDMC official said. “From 6-23 September, there have been 147 admissions, out of which 122 belonged to Uttar Pradesh, 11 from Haryana and 14 from Delhi for diphtheria cases. 18 of them have died till date,” he said. Outbreak News Today

India: Suicide by women is a major public health concern in India

25 September - ... [A] group of 30 public health researchers and doctors across India examined and evaluated data from national sources to study the suicide death rates for men and women. Their findings, published last week in the medical journal Lancet Public Health, brought out some startling revelations. India accounted for 37 percent of all suicides reported globally for women and 26 percent for men. In 2016, an estimated 230,300 Indians died of suicide, a 40 percent increase from 1990 and only slightly less than the casualties from traffic accidents reported that year. NPR

Thailand: Jail birds - Thailand considers prison for feeding pigeons

26 September - The Thai capital is considering jailing people who feed pigeons in public to try to eliminate the risk of bird flu and other diseases, officials said on Wednesday. The
Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is spearheading a campaign to catch pigeons and has vowed to impose a ban on feeding them - violators could be jailed for up to three months, face a 25,000 baht ($770) fine, or both. ... Taweesak [Lertprapan, deputy Bangkok governor] said health risks from pigeons include respiratory diseases, meningitis and bird flu. Reuters

U.S.: AAP opposes dangerous public charge proposal

23 September - Yesterday, the Department of Homeland Security announced its plan to issue a proposed regulation that could threaten the health and well-being of millions of children and families. "Public charge" is a test used to decide if someone can obtain a visa or a green card. The proposed regulation expands the test to consider whether a parent and, in some cases, her child has used or is likely to use government programs, including Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and housing assistance. By widening the test in this way, millions of children and families are at risk of being deprived of vital nutrition, health and housing services out of fear that using such programs puts obtaining a visa or green card in jeopardy. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges the Administration to immediately rescind its public charge proposal. AAP

U.S.: Dozens of doctors who screen immigrants have record of ‘egregious infractions,’ report says

26 September - The doctors tapped by the federal government to medically screen immigrants seeking green cards include dozens with a history of “egregious infractions,” according to a report from a federal watchdog agency. The report looked at more than 5,500 doctors across the country used by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services as of June 2017 to examine those seeking green cards. More than 130 had some background of wrongdoing, including one who sexually exploited female patients and another who tried to have a dissatisfied patient killed, the report said. The report, made public Tuesday by the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Inspector General, said the failure to effectively screen the doctors put immigrants "at risk of abuse."
The New York Times

U.S.: E.P.A. places the head of its Office of Children’s Health on leave

26 September - The Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday placed the head of its Office of Children’s Health Protection on administrative leave, an unusual move that appeared to reflect an effort to minimize the role of the office. Dr. Ruth Etzel, a pediatrician
and epidemiologist who has been a leader in children’s environmental health for 30 years ... was placed on administrative leave late Tuesday and asked to hand over her badge, keys and cellphone, according to an E.P.A. official familiar with the decision who was not authorized to discuss the move and who asked not to be identified. The official said Dr. Etzel was not facing disciplinary action and would continue to receive pay and benefits. The New York Times

U.S.: FDA releases new guidance on drug compounding

27 September - Anna Abram, deputy commissioner for Policy, Planning, Legislation and Analysis, said FDA frequently finds insanitary conditions during its inspections of compounding facilities, "such as vermin, insects, and microbial growth in areas where drugs required to be sterile are produced." FDA released draft and final guidance documents this week related to drug compounding, announcing them in a statement attributed to Anna Abram, FDA deputy commissioner for Policy, Planning, Legislation, and Analysis. Occupational Health and Safety

U.S.: Fewer U.S. adults getting unnecessary knee surgery

24 September - So-called arthroscopic knee surgery is becoming a less common treatment for adults with torn cartilage or painful arthritis as a growing body of evidence shows little benefit from these operations, a U.S. study suggests. Researchers examined data on all surgeries done on patients 18 and older in Florida from 2002 to 2015, including a total of 868,482 arthroscopic knee procedures. Overall, rates of these operations declined 23 percent during the study period, with sharper decreases after 2008. Reuters

U.S.: HHS, CDC issue AMR 'challenge' to public, private sectors

26 September - The U.S. government is challenging world leaders, corporations, and non-governmental groups to step up their efforts against antimicrobial resistance (AMR). In a kick-off event last night at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York, US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar called on public- and private-sector organizations around the world to make formal commitments to the AMR Challenge, a yearlong initiative led by HHS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). ... The challenge asks for at least one commitment in one of five areas: improving antibiotic use in humans and animals; reducing antibiotics and resistant bacteria in the environment; developing new antibiotics, vaccines, and diagnostics; enhancing data collection and sharing; and improving infection prevention and control. CIDRAP News
U.S.: Puerto Rico's tap water often goes untested, raising fears about lead contamination

20 September - ... For decades, [Puerto Rico’s] water authority has racked up fines and violations for failing to adequately test the tap water for bacteria, chemicals, and other contaminants, breeding distrust and potentially contributing to waterborne disease. "Unfortunately Puerto Rico has the worst record in the U.S. for drinking water safety," says Erik Olson, a senior health policy advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council. And it’s not just bacteria and viruses. The most recent federal data shows widespread failures to monitor and report another contaminant: lead. According to data reported by the island’s water systems between January 2015 and March 2018, 97 percent of Puerto Rico’s population is served by a local drinking water system with at least one recent violation of the Safe Drinking Water Act’s lead and copper testing requirements. NPR

U.S.: The NIH undiagnosed diseases network expands

24 September - Grants to improve and accelerate the diagnosis of rare and undiagnosed conditions were made to academic medical centers across the nation Monday. The new awards are part of the second phase of the National Institutes of Health’s Undiagnosed Diseases Network (UDN). The total investment planned for the UDN over the next four years will be approximately $100 million, pending the availability of funds. These grants will expand the UDN from seven to 12 clinical sites, increasing the geographical distribution of the nationwide network and the number of people with access to a UDN clinical site. Since opening to applications in 2015, the network has already diagnosed over 200 cases that had long been mysteries to the medical community. NIH

U.S.: Trump administration launches review of government-funded fetal tissue research

25 September - The Trump administration has launched a review of all federally funded research that uses fetal tissue and has canceled one contract for such material, stepping into a decades-old controversy that has been a sidelight to the ideological war over abortion. Federal health officials dispatched a letter Monday ending a contract with a California-based nonprofit group targeted by social conservatives in Congress and a coalition of antiabortion and faith-based groups. The Washington Post

U.S.: Trump sparks outrage with plan to divert nearly $200 million from health programs to fund child detention

24 September – President Donald Trump faced a backlash after his administration announced plans to divert nearly $200 million from health programs to fund the detention
of unaccompanied immigrant children caught crossing the U.S. border illegally. The Department of Health and Human Services notified Congress in a letter Wednesday that it planned to transfer as much as $186 million from its programs to help cover the costs of housing the growing number of children stopped at the U.S.-Mexico border. The transfer would affect several HHS divisions, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which would lose $16.7 million, and the Medicare and Medicaid programs, which would see $9.8 million withdrawn from funding for their operations, as well as $87.3 million overall from the National Institutes of Health, according to The Hill. Newsweek

U.S.: West Virginia reports an additional 300 hepatitis A outbreak cases in past month

26 September - On August 26, we reported that West Virginia’s hepatitis A outbreak had topped 1,000 cases. Fast forward one month and the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health now reports 1,318 outbreak cases. In the current outbreak, more than half the cases required hospitalization and two deaths have been reported. About six out of 10 people infected were co-infected with hepatitis C and nearly eight out of 10 reported illicit drug use. Outbreak News Today

HURRICANE FLORENCE

U.S.: Dam breach sends toxic coal ash flowing into a major North Carolina river

22 September - North Carolina floodwaters continued to inundate a 47-year-old basin of toxic coal ash alongside Duke Energy’s L.V. Sutton power plant on Saturday, sending polluted waters pouring into a man-made lake and then into the Cape Fear River. The rising waters also swamped a 625-megawatt natural gas plant at the site, forcing it to shut down. ... [Duke spokeswoman Paige H.] Sheehan said Duke has deployed booms with curtains below them to try to contain some of the leaking material. The Washington Post

U.S.: Florence’s devastation eased by military response

22 September - ... North Carolina is home to a considerable portion of the nation’s military. Fort Bragg alone is home to a little more than one-tenth of the Army. ... The service members were in the storm’s path, but that also means they were already there to help. More than 3,000 National Guard soldiers were involved in relief efforts. And hundreds of Fort Bragg soldiers joined them, eventually joined by troops from outside the state, too. As of Wednesday, they had rescued more than 400 people and more than 40 animals from floodwaters and delivered thousands of meals. And that's not counting the uncountable — hundreds, if not thousands, of local troops who responded to the storm out of uniform by
helping their friends and neighbors. They helped with hasty repairs, opened their homes to the displaced and assisted in the rescue of the stranded. The Fayetteville Observer

Honduras: Honduras reports more than 5,000 mumps cases this year

22 September - The Honduran Ministry of Health reported recently (computer translated) that more than 5,000 mumps cases have been seen in the country this year to date. ... Honduras reports the government has declared a medical state of emergency. The Honduran Ministry of Health said this week that there are currently 3,266,931 adults within the country susceptible to mumps because they never received the vaccine as children.

The Americas: PAHO reports more than 6,000 measles cases in Americas

24 September - Since the first of the year, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has recorded 6,629 measles cases, including 72 deaths, in 11 countries in North, Central, and South America. The strong majority of cases (4,605, 62 deaths) are from Venezuela, which has been battling a resurgence of the virus since last year. ... Brazil has recorded 1,735 cases, including 10 deaths, in an outbreak that's spilled over from Venezuela. Strains of measles in that country are identical to those circulating in Venezuela, PAHO said. ... The United States has recorded 124 cases this year, and Colombia has confirmed 85.

Venezuela: As Venezuelans go hungry, Trump targets food corruption

24 September - The June meeting was conducted behind closed doors far from the klieg-light attention normally focused on Venezuela. ... U.S. Treasury Department officials distributed a list of suspected shell companies that they believe senior Venezuelan officials have used across the globe to siphon off millions of dollars from food import contracts amid widespread starvation in the oil-rich nation. ... [F]inancial forensic investigators from the U.S. and three conservative Latin American allies — Mexico, Panama and Colombia — traced transactions by companies believed to be controlled by a government-connected businessman. AP
Venezuela: Chinese medical vessel docks in Venezuela

23 September - The Chinese army medical vessel "Peace Ark" arrived in Venezuela's La Guaira port on Saturday, as the country faces a deep economic crisis that has devastated its public health services. It is the latest stop for the People's Liberation Army Navy's ship in its 11-nation "Mission Harmony" tour. The visit is taking place on the heels of the U.S. announcing that it would also be sending a navy medical ship, the USS Comfort, to help Venezuelan refugees in Colombia, a move that Caracas has criticized. Top Venezuelan officials saw the Comfort's deployment as a threat and a sign that the U.S. seeks a military intervention on humanitarian grounds. DW
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