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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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Is nature healing? U.S. military aims to find out

30 May - ... The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is launching a collaborative study that will attempt to scientifically measure the physical and mental effects of being outdoors in a peaceful setting, it announced today. ... The military has operated a project dubbed the Green Road over the past several years. As part of that, architects and engineers built a nature path that weaves through woods near living quarters for long-term patients at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Bethesda. The path is used by patients and their caregivers to “enjoy a breathtaking view” of the woods. ... Officials noticed positive benefits of the tranquility on patients. Now researchers hope to back that observation up with hard data. They plan to measure the heart rates and biomarkers contained in the sweat of patients who use the natural area at Walter Reed. They’ll compare that data against patients who spend time in busier parts of the complex, said Patricia Deuster, a professor at the university’s Consortium for Health and Military Performance. Her researchers are looking for study participants, including wounded warriors and their caregivers. Philly.com

Military couples who avoid problems fare worse after deployment

31 May - Military families face many stresses and partners who tend to avoid dealing with issues directly before a deployment are more likely to have mental health and relationship problems after the soldier returns home, according to a recent U.S. study. ... [T]he study team surveyed 122 National Guard members and their partners. Before deployment, the service members and their partners answered questions about their own coping styles to determine if each member of the couple had an active coping style, meaning they tried to reduce the stress of a situation, including accepting it, seeing it in a more positive light, developing strategies to manage issues and/or turning to others for support. Or, if they had an avoidant style, meaning they avoid dealing with problems, rely on denial, giving up or using alcohol or drugs to cope. ... The researchers found that having an active coping style predeployment did not have a significant effect on any of the outcomes when the soldiers returned from deployment. In contrast, both soldiers and their significant others who had an avoidant coping style were significantly more likely to experience depression, anxiety and PTSD symptoms after the soldiers returned home, compared with those who didn’t avoid their issues. Reuters

No health survey conducted before Pentagon built Guantánamo’s Camp Justice

25 May - Ten years after the Pentagon opened its war court complex at Guantánamo as an expeditionary legal complex, there is no agreement that Camp Justice is expeditionary at all, according to a report released Thursday by the Navy. The report ... reflects the haphazard nature of the development of the complex in a series of recommendations to monitor for
No link found between cancer and conditions at Guantanamo

25 May - U.S. military health experts found no link between several cases of cancer and environmental conditions in an area used for legal proceedings at the Guantanamo Bay detention center, according to a report released Thursday by the Navy. The report found no evidence that people working in Camp Justice were exposed to carcinogens above standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It said there were five cases of cancer among 700 people who worked at the legal compound from 2004-2016 but could not trace them to conditions at the Navy base in southeastern Cuba. The report was prepared by the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center. Four attorneys who have worked at Camp Justice filed suit in April against the Department of Defense, challenging an earlier finding that the area is safe. Their lawyer, Daniel Small, said he was reviewing the new report and could not comment further. The Defense Department has asked a judge to dismiss the suit. Navy Times

Research shows how PTSD can trigger growth in veterans

31 May - Some troops return from war only to face a new fight — symptoms of PTSD. But everything that follows traumatic experiences isn't bad. In fact, research shows they can actually trigger growth. ... Psychological trauma like that caused by combat can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD can be debilitating, but researchers are getting a better handle on whether there may be a silver lining for those who suffer from it. ... Jessica Kelley Morgan is lead author of a new study of post-traumatic growth among military veterans. PTG, as it's called, has long been studied in civilians and veterans. But the team she worked with at North Carolina State University focuses on PTG's relationship with post-traumatic stress disorder because earlier research looked mainly at one or the other. NPR

Sen. Grassley releases report on Wounded Warrior Project spending

25 May - Last year ... dozens of former employees shared concerns about Wounded Warrior Project’s spending and programs for veterans. ... Sen. Chuck Grassley led an inquiry into the allegations. ... The charity had said it spent 80 cents of each donor dollar on programs for veterans, but ... Grassley's nearly 500-page report to the Senate Judiciary and Finance Committees found Wounded Warrior Project was spending only about 68 percent of donor dollars on programs for veterans. CEO Steven Nardizzi was fired last year, along with nearly the entire executive suite of the charity. ... In a statement, Wounded Warrior Project said it

May 2017 - During 2007–2016, there were 237 incident diagnoses of acute hepatitis A, with an overall incidence rate of 1.88 cases per 100,000 person-years (p-yrs). Crude overall rates of hepatitis A were highest among service members in the youngest age group, those in healthcare occupations, and among Air Force and Navy members. Service members of "other" or unknown race/ethnicity and non-Hispanic black service members had higher overall incidence rates of hepatitis A, compared to their non-Hispanic white and Hispanic counterparts. Annual incidence rates of hepatitis A were relatively stable until 2012 when rates peaked at 2.94 per 100,000. Rates dipped to 1.41 per 100,000 p-yrs in 2015 and then increased to 2.22 per 100,000 p-yrs in 2016. During the 10-year period, annual rates among male service members were relatively stable. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

Wearable sensors could prevent troops from overheating

30 May - … [A] multi-institutional team is working to develop sensors that can identify the warning signs over an overheated system and give commanders a warning when troops need to stop and cool down. "You can have somebody go down from heat exhaustion, and then you have to take a soldier away from the fight. Heat exhaustion not only impacts soldiers physically, but also cognitively by affecting decision-making, which is detrimental to a mission," said Mark Buller, a principle investigator with the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, or USARIEM. "By catching heat illness symptoms early, you can do something about it." USARIEM is seeking just such an early-warning system as part of a joint project with a team from MIT Lincoln Laboratory and a Marine Corps expeditionary rifle squad. Together they are looking to combine a wearable sensor with an algorithm that will look for telltale signs of pending heat stress in simple biological markers. C4ISRNET

Baby teeth link autism and heavy metals, NIH study suggests

1 June - Baby teeth from children with autism contain more toxic lead and less of the essential nutrients zinc and manganese, compared to teeth from children without autism, according to an innovative study funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health
Sciences (NIEHS), part of the National Institutes of Health. The researchers studied twins to control genetic influences and focus on possible environmental contributors to the disease. The findings ... suggest that differences in early-life exposure to metals, or more importantly how a child's body processes them, may affect the risk of autism. The differences in metal uptake between children with and without autism were especially notable during the months just before and after the children were born. NIH

Dentists are pushed to screen patients for domestic abuse — and offer help

31 May- An activist group of dentists and hygienists is pushing the profession to use checkups to screen patients for signs of domestic abuse — and take action to help patients who may be vulnerable. ... In 2015, Maryland began requiring dentists to take two hours of continuing education on abuse and neglect in order to renew their licenses. Dental professionals in Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania have reached out to see how they can get a similar effort underway. ... It's estimated that 70 percent of injuries from abuse are on the head and neck. That can put signs of the abuse front and center for dentists — who, with a twice-annual cleaning, might be seeing some patients more often than a primary care provider. ... One survey of domestic abuse victims found that over half had visited a dentist when signs of abuse were present, but nearly 90 percent of those individuals weren't asked about their injuries. The majority said they wished their dentist had asked. STAT

Handshake-free zones target spread of germs in the hospital

29 May - Dr. Mark ... Sklansky decided to test a new method for limiting the spread of germs and reducing the transmission of disease in the hospital: a handshake-free zone. ... Sklansky doesn't believe this is a substitute for handwashing, but he does think reducing handshakes could help cut down on the spread of infection. ... He picked a place where patients are especially vulnerable — the neonatal intensive care unit at two of UCLA's hospitals, one in Westwood and one in Santa Monica. ... Staff and families in the units were told the reasons for dropping the handshake. And signs were posted designating the new handshake-free zones. The signs feature two hands gripping each other inside a circle with a blue line through it and the words: "To help reduce the spread of germs, our NICU is now a handshake-free zone. Please find other ways to greet each other." ... In a survey of staff and family members about the experience, Sklansky and his colleagues found that establishing handshake-free zones does reduce the frequency of handshakes. And most health care workers support the idea. NPR

Mosquitoes infected with virus-suppressing bacteria could help control dengue fever

30 May - Mosquitoes infected with the bacteria Wolbachia are significantly worse vectors
for dengue virus, but how to establish and spread *Wolbachia* in an urban mosquito population is unclear. A study publishing on 30th May 2017 in the open access journal PLOS Biology by Michael Turelli from University of California, Davis, and colleagues from Scott O’Neill’s “Eliminate Dengue Program” demonstrates that over time, strategic releases may be enough for mosquitoes infected with the dengue-suppressing bacteria to spread across large cities. *Medical Xpress*

**Science needs a solution for the temptation of positive results**

29 May - A few years back, scientists at the biotechnology company Amgen set out to replicate 53 landmark studies that argued for new approaches to treat cancers using both existing and new molecules. They were able to replicate the findings of the original research only 11 percent of the time. ... These 53 papers were published in high-profile journals, and the 21 that were published in the highest-impact journals were cited an average of 231 times in subsequent work. In 2011, Bayer pharmaceuticals reported similar reproduction work. Of the 67 projects they conducted to rerun experiments (47 of which involved cancer), only about 25 percent ended with results in line with the original findings. ... For years, financial conflicts of interest have been properly identified as biasing research in improper ways. Other conflicts of interest exist, though, and they are just as powerful — if not more so — in influencing the work of scientists across the country and around the globe. *The New York Times*

**Seventieth World Health Assembly update**

29 May - Delegates at the World Health Assembly have reached new agreements on dementia; immunization; refugee and migrant health; substandard and falsified medical products, and the world drug problem. ... [They] endorsed a global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017–2025 and committed to developing ambitious national strategies and implementation plans. The global plan aims to improve the lives of people with dementia, their families and the people who care for them, while decreasing the impact of dementia on communities and countries. ... Delegates agreed to strengthen immunization to achieve the goals of the Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP). ... Today’s resolution urges Member States to strengthen the governance and leadership of national immunization programmes. It also calls on them to improve monitoring and surveillance systems to ensure that up-to-date data guides policy and programmatic decisions to optimize performance and impact. ... Delegates asked the Director-General to provide advice to countries in order to promote the health of refugees and migrants, and to gather evidence that will contribute to a draft global action to be considered at the 72nd World Health Assembly in 2019. ... The Assembly also agreed a definition of “unregistered or unlicensed medical products”. ... Delegates agreed on the need for intensified efforts to help Member States address the world drug problem. They asked the WHO Secretariat to strengthen its collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Narcotics Control Board to implement the health-related recommendations of in the outcome document of the 2016 Special Session of the United Nations General
Study details flow of microbes in a new hospital

26 May - In December 2012, 2 months before the University of Chicago Medicine’s Center for Care and Discovery opened its doors to patients, a team of scientists was hard at work swabbing surfaces in the new hospital. ... Collecting bacteria before the hospital was occupied by patients and staff enabled the scientists to establish a baseline, so they could understand which microbes were brought in to the environment from the outside, and how they evolved once they were inside the hospital. ... What they found once the hospital doors opened, unsurprisingly, was that the diversity of the microbial environment changed dramatically with the arrival of patients and staff. Prior to opening, the predominant bacteria were *Pseudomonas* and *Acinetobacter*. Afterwards, human skin-associated organisms such as *Corynebacterium*, *Staphylococcus*, and *Streptococcus* took over. ... Despite daily cleaning of the rooms, Gilbert and his team found that when new patients initially entered rooms, they would immediately begin to pick up the microbes left by previous patients and by staff on hospital surfaces. But within 24 hours, the flow of microbes started to reverse, from the patient back to the room. So over the course of a patient’s stay, their skin and the room surfaces became microbially similar.

CIDRAP

Ultra-tough antibiotic to fight superbugs

30 May - US scientists have re-engineered a vital antibiotic in a bid to wipe out one of the world’s most threatening superbugs. Their new version of vancomycin is designed to be ultra-tough and appears to be a thousand times more potent than the old drug, *PNAS* journal reports. It fights bacteria in three different ways, making it much less likely that the bugs can dodge the attack. It is yet to be tested in animals and people, however. The Scripps Research Institute team hope the drug will be ready for use within five years if it passes more tests. BBC News

World No Tobacco Day 2017: Beating tobacco for health, prosperity, the environment and national development

30 May - Action to stamp out tobacco use can help countries prevent millions of people falling ill and dying from tobacco-related disease, combat poverty and, according to a first-ever WHO report, reduce large-scale environmental degradation. On World No Tobacco Day 2017, WHO is highlighting how tobacco threatens the development of nations worldwide, and is calling on governments to implement strong tobacco control measures. These include banning marketing and advertising of tobacco, promoting plain packaging of tobacco products, raising excise taxes, and making indoor public places and workplaces smoke-free. WHO
ZIKA VIRUS

States fear price of new Zika vaccine will be more than they can pay

30 May - The U.S. Army is planning to grant an exclusive license to the French pharmaceutical company Sanofi Pasteur, Inc. to manufacture and sell a Zika vaccine the Army developed last year. And that has Rebekah Gee, Louisiana’s secretary of health, worried about paying for it. ... If the Army goes through with its plan, she says, Sanofi could set a price for the vaccine at a level that Louisianans just won’t be able to afford. Gee is among a growing number of public officials and activists who are demanding that Sanofi agree to show restraint when it sets the price for the vaccine, which was developed by the Army. She wants the company to promise in writing that it won’t charge U.S. buyers any more than it charges in other wealthy countries – like its home, France. ... Last week, several groups including Doctors without Borders and Knowledge Ecology International appealed to the Army to delay granting Sanofi the exclusive license until the company agrees to reasonable price terms. NPR

What the DNA of the Zika virus tells scientists about its rapid spread

25 May - ... Three independent research groups [created] a family tree of the Zika virus. ... The result of the 183 genetic analyses is a sprawling family tree of Zika viruses — all related, but each just a tiny bit different from its predecessors or its progeny. By carefully recording the dates and locations of the Zika samples collected between 2013 and 2016, the three research teams in effect show when and where Zika virus began circulating in a given country or territory. They looked at mutations in the genetic fine print of the samples and lined them up end to end, allowing them to refine the dates, pedigrees and origins of each. The family tree allowed them to trace Zika’s path as it traveled through the Americas. It provides evidence for the potent effect that international travel, migration and mosquito-control efforts can exert over the spread of a virus. It also serves as a test bed for tracking the progress of future disease-causing viruses as they encounter dense populations with no resistance to them. Los Angeles Times

Zika virus infection – India

26 May - On 15 May 2017, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare-Government of India (MoHFW) reported three laboratory-confirmed cases of Zika virus disease in Bapunagar area, Ahmedabad District, Gujarat, State, India. ... This report is important as it describes the first cases of Zika virus infections and provides evidence on the circulation of the virus in India. These findings suggest low level transmission of Zika virus and new cases may occur in the future. Efforts to strengthen surveillance should be maintained in order to better characterize the intensity of the viral circulation and geographical spread, and monitor Zika
INFLUENZA

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

During week 20 (May 14–20, 2017), influenza activity decreased in the United States.
- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 20 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: Three influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. CDC

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 20/2017 (15 – 21 May 2017)
- Influenza activity remained at out-of-season levels in most countries. Low intensity of influenza was reported by all of the 38 reporting countries.
- The proportion of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza viruses was 7%, lower than in the previous week (8%). Influenza viruses were detected in 6 countries only and numbers were low.
- All sentinel detections were type B viruses but numbers were low and the decline since week 14/2017 continued.

H7N9 cases ebb in China as CDC creates vaccine virus

26 May - The number of new H7N9 avian flu cases in China declined again this week, which if sustained would fit the pattern of a lull over the summer months. ... Nine cases were reported in China, eight of which involved contact with poultry or their environments. ... The weekly total is down from 16 reported the previous week. ... Meanwhile, the US CDC said in a May 23 update on China’s H7N9 developments that it has completed work on a new H7N9 candidate vaccine virus that matches a new lineage of the virus that has recently emerged in China. CIDRAP
NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

2017 Week 20 (through 20 May 2017):

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

NIH scientists find real-time imaging in mice a promising influenza study tool

30 May - Real-time imaging of influenza infection in mice is a promising new method to quickly monitor disease progression and to evaluate whether candidate vaccines and treatments are effective in this animal model, according to National Institutes of Health (NIH) scientists. A group from the NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) evaluated the live imaging system as a potential alternative to traditional methods of assessing investigative influenza vaccines and treatment in mice, which can be time consuming and require more study animals for valid statistical comparison. NIH

Study: Maternal flu vaccine may protect infants against more than flu

30 May - The benefits of vaccinating women against flu during pregnancy may extend beyond influenza to protecting young infants against acute respiratory infections from bacterial causes, a research team based in South Africa reported. ... The study included 1,026 babies born to mothers who had received the flu vaccine and 1,023 infants of mothers immunized with placebo. When researchers looked at all-cause acute lower respiratory tract infection (ALRI), hospitalization incidence was lower in the babies of moms who had received the flu vaccine. Of 30 ALRI hospitalizations in the first 3 months of life, 9 were in the flu-vaccine group and 21 were in the placebo group, for a vaccine efficacy of 57.5%. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)

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

During 7 - 20 May 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 19 & 20), a total of 54 specimens were collected and received from 24 locations. Results were finalized for 36 specimens from 18 locations. During Week 19, two influenza A(H3N2) and two influenza B viruses were identified. No influenza viruses were detected during Week 20. Approximately 17% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 19 and 0% during Week 20. The influenza percent positive for the season is currently 35%. US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency
WHO: Influenza Update

29 May - In the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity started to increase slowly but remained low in general. Influenza activity in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere continued to decrease. Worldwide, influenza B viruses were predominant. WHO

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Bulgaria to conduct food product checks amid quality concerns

27 May - Bulgaria said on Saturday it would conduct checks on different food products of multinational companies sold in the Balkan state and compare them with food sold in richer western European countries, amid concerns over quality. Consumer groups have complained that popular brands use poorer-quality ingredients in products sold in central and eastern Europe than in countries like Germany and Austria. However, they have had little recourse to complain because the European Union only requires that the packaging contain a clear list of all ingredients. Bulgaria's Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Rumen Porozhanov said experts had already purchased chocolate, dairy and meat products, non-alcoholic beverages, juices and baby foods from Germany and Austria and would make the quality checks after buying the identical products in Bulgaria. Reuters

Germany: E. coli outbreak in Germany sickens 30, half confirmed, 1 dead

31 May - An E. coli O157 outbreak, dating back to December and believed to be linked to minced - or ground - meat has taken a life in Germany. The outbreak has sickened about 30 people since it began. The cause is Shiga toxin-producing E. coli O157 with the onset date for the most recent confirmed case being April 13. Molecular typing shows close relationship among the isolates from 14 cases that have been confirmed for E. coli O157. A 15th case is suspected. That probable case had a positive stool sample, but the culturing was not successful. The confirmed cases involve residents of Berlin and Northwest Germany. The cases are split between males and females and ages range from 1 to 36. Among the confirmed cases, 13 developed hemolytic uremic syndrome or HUS, including one German who died. All individuals who had no pre-existing conditions required intensive care in hospitals. Food Safety News
Russia: *Brucella* outbreak, affecting humans and animals, reported in Voronezh region

30 May - An outbreak of brucellosis has affected two villages in the Novokhopersky district, Voronezh Oblast in western Russia has affected 84 sheep and goats from farms totaling more than 500 animals, according to a vestivrn.ru report (computer translated). In addition, at least one farmworker has been infected. The farms have been quarantined. Inspectors of the Rosselkhознадзор caution the public not to drink fresh milk or eat home-made cheese. Outbreak News Today

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**WELLNESS**

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Boost your workouts with caffeine, even if you chug coffee daily

31 May - Caffeine improves athletic performance. This is a truth almost universally acknowledged in exercise science. But scientists, coaches and athletes also have thought that to gain any performance boost from taking caffeine before an event, an athlete had to abstain from the stuff for days or weeks before a big event. A new study published in the Journal of Applied Physiology intimates, however, that these ideas about caffeine and performance are out of date and that someone can swill coffee every day and still get a caffeine performance buzz when needed. The New York Times

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More than a third of teenage girls experience depression, new study says

31 May - A large new study out this week contains some alarming data about the state of children’s mental health in the United States, finding that depression in many children appears to start as early as age 11. By the time they hit age 17, the analysis found, 13.6 percent of boys and a staggering 36.1 percent of girls have been or are depressed. These numbers are significantly higher than previous estimates. ... [T]he study was based on data compiled from in-person interviews with more than 100,000 children who participated in the National Survey of Drug Use and Health from 2009 to 2014. ... Through the survey, they were able to capture a broader group of children than those who have a formal diagnosis and who may be in treatment. The Washington Post
The Personal Health Inventory: Current use, perceived barriers, and benefits

May 2017 - To better meet the needs and values of patients, the VA has been promulgating a paradigm shift away from the disease-focused model toward a whole health, patient-centered focus. To achieve this goal, the VA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation has advocated the use of the personal health inventory (PHI). ... The authors surveyed [primary care providers (PCPs)] at VACHS sites about their current use of the PHI. Of respondents, 84% stated that they had heard of the PHI. Of those, 68% felt very or somewhat comfortable explaining the PHI to a patient, with slightly fewer, 64%, very or somewhat comfortable explaining the PHI to a coworker. Forty-eight percent stated that they had implemented the PHI in their clinical practices. Federal Practitioner

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USAFRICOM

Africa: Could big data help end hunger in Africa?

30 May - ... The International Center for Tropical Agriculture has spent the past four years developing the Nutrition Early Warning System, or NEWS. The goal is to catch the subtle signs of a hunger crisis brewing in Africa as much as a year in advance. CIAT says the system uses machine learning. As more information is fed into the system, the algorithms will get better at identifying patterns and trends. The system will get smarter. Information Technology expert Andy Jarvis leads the project. ... CIAT says NEWS will be able to draw insights from a massive amount of diverse data enabling it to identify hunger risks faster than traditional methods. “What is different about NEWS is that it pays attention to malnutrition, not just drought or famine, but the nutrition outcome that really matters, malnutrition especially in women and children. For the first time, we are saying these are the options way ahead of time. That gives policy makers an opportunity to really do what they intend to do which is make the lives of women and children better in Africa,” said Dr. Mercy Lung’aho, a CIAT nutrition expert. VOA

Democratic Republic of Congo: DRC approves use of Ebola vaccine

30 May - The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has approved the use of the experimental Ebola vaccine, rVSV-ZEBOV, while a new study on the vaccine showed overall good safety data, but with possible effects on joints. The Merck vaccine has not yet been licensed, but clinical trials conducted in 2015 and 2016 showed it to be extremely effective in preventing Ebola virus disease. According to the latest situation report, dated May 28, the World Health Organization (WHO) said the protocol for a ring vaccination, which was
Niger/Nigeria: MSF tackles meningitis C outbreaks in Niger, Nigeria

31 May - Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announced yesterday that it was continuing vaccination efforts to help quell one of the largest outbreaks of meningitis C in Africa's meningitis belt. Nigeria has reported 13,943 suspected cases and 1,112 deaths since Dec 13, 2016. In Niger, there have been 3,037 recorded cases since Jan 1 and 179 deaths. Last week, MSF finished a vaccination campaign that reached 136,000 people in the worst-hit areas of Nigeria. A separate campaign vaccinated 140,600 people in the Sokoto region of Nigeria. In Niger, MSF worked with local authorities to launch vaccination campaigns that inoculated 463,800 people between the ages of 2 and 20 years. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

Nigeria: Famine looms in former Boko Haram stronghold in NE Nigeria

30 May - The United Nations is warning that more than 1.4 million people in northeastern Nigeria could face famine by September because of a severe funding shortage. To date, only 28 percent of the U.N. appeal for more than $1 billion to provide humanitarian aid for nearly seven million people has been received. Since Boko Haram militants began their armed rebellion against the government of Nigeria in 2009, the United Nations estimates more than 20,000 people have been killed, nearly two million are internally displaced inside the country, and about 200,000 have taken refuge in neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Nigeria, Edward Kallon, says food is in short supply and traditional coping measures have been exhausted. VOA

South Sudan: Cholera kills 248 in South Sudan – UN

29 May - At least 248 people have died from cholera outbreak across 19 counties in South Sudan since the initial outbreak was reported in June 2016, the UN said on Sunday. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said as at May 15, 8,160 cholera cases had been reported since the initial case was recorded on June 18, 2016. Health experts have highlighted that the number of cases recorded could be as little as 10 per cent of the overall number of cholera cases occurring during the outbreak. According to OCHA, children and young adults under 30 years are the most affected, constituting 70 percent of the cases. According to the UN, there are concerns that the outbreak will intensify and spread during the upcoming rainy season due to continued conflict, displacement and inadequate access to clean water and sanitation. Xinhua
Yemen: Yemen cholera death toll rises, but number of infections drop – WHO

29 May - The number of people who have died in a cholera epidemic affecting Yemen has risen to at least 471, according to World Health Organization (WHO) figures released on Monday. But the latest WHO bulletin covering the period from April 27, said that there was a “significant decrease” in the daily average number of cases recorded in the week up to May 27 compared to the previous seven-day period. The epidemic began in October and grew until December. It then dwindled but was never brought fully under control, and a new surge in cases began in April. ... The bulletin said that the total number of suspected cases stood at 51,832. Reuters

Yemen: UN - Yemen now world's largest food insecurity crisis

30 May - The United Nations humanitarian chief said Tuesday that Yemen has become the world’s largest food insecurity crisis, with more than 17 million people struggling daily to get enough to eat. Stephen O’Brien told the U.N. Security Council that of the 17 million people who are food insecure, nearly 7 million of them are “one step away from famine.” What is worse, the threat of famine is driven and exacerbated by conflict,” O’Brien said, speaking of the more than two-year-old war between Yemen’s government and Houthi rebels. O’Brien noted that the country is not facing a drought, a common cause of famine, but that the crisis is entirely man-made. VOA

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Czech Republic: Beer-loving Czechs stub out cigarettes as pubs go smoke-free

31 May - Pubs in the Czech capital Prague filled up on Tuesday night and some held special events as smokers lit up for the last time before a ban on smoking in bars and restaurants took effect. The ban, which started at midnight, gives the beer-loving nation some of the strictest cigarette-use laws in the European Union. Most welcome it but some fear the new rules add to the list of regulations for bar owners and will harm the country’s pub culture, marking the end of an era. ... Lawmakers approved the ban following years of wrangling. Reuters
Europe: Recall of EpiPens expands to Europe, Army officials announce

26 May - A voluntary recall of certain lots of EpiPens is now expanded to include some versions sold in Europe, Army officials said Friday. The EpiPens are sold under the name FastJekt in European pharmacies. The EpiPens are being recalled because they may contain a defective part that may cause the devices to fail to activate, according to a release Friday from Regional Health Command Europe. ... The U.S. Food and Drug Administration put out a nationwide voluntary recall of EpiPens in the U.S. two months ago. The announcement Friday expands the alert to EpiPens in Europe. U.S. service members and their dependents who have the European FastJekt in the lot numbers under recall should contact the pharmacy where they got it and ask about a replacement, Army officials said. Army Times

Germany: Germany to fine parents who refuse vaccine advice under new law

26 May - Germany is set to pass a law next week that will require kindergartens to inform authorities if parents have failed to consult a doctor about vaccinating their children, with those who refuse advice subject to fines worth up to $2,800. The law, expected to take effect on June 1, comes as leaders across Europe move to tighten vaccination laws amid a spike in measles, chicken pox and mumps. By mid-April, German health officials had counted 410 measles cases compared with 325 total in 2016, BBC reported. Fox News

U.S.: Gay and transgender patients to doctors: We’ll tell. Just ask.

29 May - Do doctors need to know their patients’ sexual orientation and gender identity? A growing number of federal agencies have been pushing health care providers to ask. Federally funded community health centers, which treat millions of patients, have begun to collect the data. Electronic health software must be able to store it. ... By knowing whether a patient is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or straight, say public health experts, clinicians can be more alert to a person’s medical needs and more thoughtful in interactions. ... A new study of both patients and providers in the journal JAMA Internal Medicine looked at the feasibility of gathering such information in emergency departments. Nearly 80 percent of providers surveyed believed that patients would refuse to disclose their sexual orientation. By contrast, only 10 percent of patients from a randomized, national sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual subjects said they would refuse. The New York Times
U.S.: Health officials vow to develop drugs to curb the opioid epidemic

31 May - Top federal health officials said Wednesday that they will launch a joint effort with pharmaceuticals companies to accelerate the development of drugs aimed at helping to curb the U.S. opioid epidemic. Francis S. Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Nora D. Volkow, who heads one its components, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), announced a public-private partnership aimed at cutting in half the time ordinarily needed to develop new therapies. The goal is to rapidly bring to market three types of drugs: nonaddictive medications for chronic pain, better treatments for opioid addiction and improved methods of reversing opioid overdoses. The Washington Post

U.S.: Maryland law seeks to curb antibiotic overuse on farms

31 May - Maryland has become the second U.S. state to pass a law banning the routine use of antibiotics in healthy livestock and poultry, a move aimed at battling the rise of dangerous antibiotic-resistant bacteria known as "superbugs." Maryland's Keep Antibiotics Effective Act, which aims to end a practice that public health experts say can fuel the spread of superbugs, takes effect on Oct. 1 after Governor Larry Hogan declined to sign or veto it last week. Farmers in Maryland have until Jan. 1, 2018, to comply with the law. Roughly 70 percent of antibiotics important for human medicine are sold in the United States for use in meat and dairy production. ... California in 2015 adopted tough rules for antibiotic use on farms. Its law, which takes effect on Jan. 1, also restricts the regular use of antibiotics for disease prevention and bans antibiotic use to fatten up animals. Scientific American

U.S.: Measles outbreak in Minnesota surpasses last year’s total for the entire country

1 June - Minnesota’s measles outbreak has exceeded the total number of cases reported in the entire United States last year, with no sign of slowing. Health officials worry that the holy month of Ramadan, which began Friday night and brings Muslims together in prayer and festivities, will accelerate the spread of the highly infectious and potentially deadly disease, which is plaguing the close-knit Somali American community. Minnesota health officials are working closely with faith leaders in an unprecedented effort to spread the message that parents should get their children vaccinated and keep them home if they show symptoms of the disease. It’s the first time imams in the United States have taken such an active role in a public health crisis, health officials and Somali Americans said. The Washington Post

U.S.: Ohio sues five drug companies over opioid crisis

31 May - The state of Ohio on Wednesday sued five major drug manufacturers, accusing them of misrepresenting the risks of prescription opioid painkillers that have fueled a sky-
rocketing drug addiction epidemic. The suit, filed by Attorney General Mike DeWine, comes as a growing number of state and local governments are suing drugmakers and distributors, seeking to hold them accountable for a deadly and costly opioid crisis. Opioid drugs, including prescription painkillers and heroin, killed more than 33,000 people in the United States in 2015, more than any year on record, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ... DeWine said the companies helped unleash the crisis by spending millions of dollars marketing and promoting such drugs as OxyContin and Percocet, overstating their benefits and trivializing their potential addictive qualities. Reuters

U.S.: Out of work men more likely to suffer from bad health

30 May - There seems to be a clear correlation between health and employment status among prime-age men (25-to-54 years) in the United States. Those not taking part in the work-force in this age bracket are more often plagued by health issues than their working peers. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data quoted by the Brookings Institution, prime-age males out of the workforce are more likely to report that their health is "fair" or "poor" compared to a male in the labor force (37 percent versus 5 percent). ... The study also finds that lower work rates among this age group can contribute to declining marriage rates and psychological well-being. And in some cases even lead "to an increase in premature deaths among certain populations." In general, workers between the ages of 25 and 54 tend to be at their most productive. In the United States there has been a steady decline in workforce participation among men of that age. WKBW

U.S.: Study shows certain job factors relate to fair or poor health in U.S. workers

30 May - Occupation, lack of paid sick leave, and multiple psycho-social factors are related to workers' own perceived low health status, according to a study by researchers at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). The study. ... found that workers employed in business operations jobs, such as marketing or human resource professionals, were more likely to rate their health as fair or poor. The study also found workers who had no paid sick leave, worried about becoming unemployed, had difficulty balancing work and family, or who were bullied at work were more likely to report poor health. Although workers in production occupations were most likely to report fair or poor health when only occupation was considered, once these results were adjusted for sociodemographic factors such as age, race, family income, etc. workers in the business operations profession were 85% more likely to report fair or poor health compared with workers in all other occupations. NIOSH

U.S.: Workforce drug use on the rise

31 May - Workforce substance abuse is on the rise, driven by an increase an illicit drug use, according to a Quest Diagnostics report. The report analyzed 10 million workforce urine test results. The company noted an increase across the board for cocaine, marijuana and
methamphetamines. "This year’s findings are remarkable because they show increased rates of drug positivity for the most common illicit drugs across virtually all drug test specimen types and in all testing populations," said Dr. Barry Sample, senior director, science and technology, Quest Diagnostics. "Our analysis suggests that employers committed to creating a safe, drug-free work environment should be alert to the potential for drug use among their workforce." In 2016, 4.2 percent of all urine tests came back positive, up from 4.0 percent in 2015 and the highest rate since 2004’s 4.5 percent. EHS Today

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Bangladesh: Cyclone wreaks havoc in Rohingya refugee camps

30 May - A cyclone tore through parts of Bangladesh on Tuesday, destroying the homes of thousands of Rohingya refugees who had fled the violence in Myanmar over the last several years. The authorities in the affected districts of Cox’s Bazar and Chittagong evacuated 450,000 people before Cyclone Mora, officials said. In the coastal border district of Cox’s Bazar, where a majority of the Rohingya in Bangladesh live, more than 17,000 houses were destroyed and more than 35,000 were damaged, said Mohammad Ali Hossain, the deputy commissioner in Cox’s Bazar. Four people were killed in the Cox’s Bazar district, and 60 were injured. Officials in Chittagong said there were no casualties reported as of Tuesday afternoon. The New York Times

China: Maternal hepatitis B virus infection and risk of preterm birth in China

June 2017 - ... Several large, population-based cohort studies in developed countries have shown that maternal hepatitis B virus infections are associated with a high risk of preterm birth. However, there is little reliable evidence from China, where the rate of hepatitis B virus infection is high. ... [Researchers] investigate the association between maternal pre-pregnancy infection with hepatitis B virus and the risk of preterm birth in a population-based cohort in China. They find that maternal pre-pregnancy hepatitis B virus infection is independently associated with an increased risk of preterm birth. The Lancet

China: Study documents drug resistance in Chinese gonorrhea isolates

26 May - A surveillance study yesterday in BMC Infectious Diseases reports high levels of resistance to previously recommended antimicrobials in Neisseria gonorrhea isolates from a city in eastern China. Antimicrobial susceptibility testing on 126 N gonorrhea isolates
collected from men and women at a sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinic in Hefei, China, from January 2014 through November 2015 revealed that all isolates were resistant to ciprofloxacin, 73.8% (93 of 126) were resistant to penicillin, and 81.7% (103 of 126) were resistant to tetracycline. In addition, 28.6% (36 of 126) of the isolates were resistant to azithromycin and 11.1% (14 of 126) displayed reduced susceptibility to ceftriaxone and cefixime. ... [T]he authors of the study note that the level of azithromycin resistance is higher than in other parts of the world, a significant finding given that the World Health Organization recommends dual therapy of ceftriaxone or cefixime combined with azithromycin as the standard treatment for gonorrhea. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

India: At over 300 sites across India hazardous waste is part of the landscape and life

25 May - Nibra village in Howrah district of West Bengal looks like any ordinary village. There are wells, ponds, a playground even a small school in its vicinity. Appearances are deceptive though, the village sits on a hazardous waste site, according to environment ministry records. To be precise 4440 tonnes of chromium residue lies beneath the ground on which the settlement is built. People who live there are unaware they have built their lives on tonnes of toxic carcinogenic material. Nibra village is not the only one, there are at least 320 sites across the country that host hazardous waste which affects around 2 lakh people, directly or indirectly. They are called orphan sites because industries and municipal agencies dumped hazardous waste at such sites and abandoned them. The environment ministry is yet to finalise even guidelines and rules to tackle hazardous waste polluted sites. Most of the sites are located in the states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa, Delhi, Karnataka, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh/Telangana and Punjab. Hindustan Times

India: Watch women shame men who pee in public

29 May - An ad that came out on Monday has gone viral this week in India. The topic? Open urination and defecation. ... In this video, which had almost 600,000 views by early Monday, the men are shamed into building toilets at their homes. ... It's funny, but it's also calling attention to a serious problem in India — a lack of toilets. ... More than 500 million people — representing more than half of the world's toilet-less people – live in India. According to UNICEF, India has nearly 200,000 diarrheal deaths yearly among children under age five, the highest number in the world. Open defecation is a contributing factor. NPR

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's flood survivors threatened by dengue, disease - aid workers

29 May - Thousands of survivors of devastating floods and landslides in Sri Lanka are at risk of potentially fatal diseases such as dengue fever, charities warned on Monday as the death
toll from the disaster continued to rise. Torrential rains over the last four days have sparked widespread flooding and triggered landslides in southwestern parts of the Indian Ocean island. At least 177 people have died and almost half a million others have had their lives disrupted. ... Sri Lanka’s ministry of disaster management says almost 558,000 people from 15 of the country’s 25 districts have been hit by the disaster. Villages and towns have been inundated, thousands of homes damaged and agriculture land swamped. Around 75,000 people in the worst-affected districts have been relocated to temporary shelters. Reuters

PAHO reports 38,000 new chikungunya cases

30 May - Led almost entirely by newly reported cases in Brazil, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) reported 38,282 new chikungunya cases late last week, an 80% increase in the yearly total. The new cases lift the number of 2017 cases to 86,433, according to the May 26 update. ... Brazil, reporting on 3 weeks' worth of cases, noted 37,939 new infections and 80,949 for the year, or 94% of the cases reported so far in 2017. Peru had the second-largest increase, with 200 new cases and 997 total. The number of deaths from the disease climbed from 9 to 13, and all of them have been in Brazil. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

Peru: Peru dengue update - more deaths reported through May than in all of 2016

1 June - A Spanish language media report states (computer translated) the following concerning the dengue fever outbreak in Peru: “The outbreak seems out of control, amid efforts by the authorities”. Through May 2017, Peru has reported more dengue-related fatalities (54) than reported in all of 2016 (41) or 2015 (52), according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). 28 of the deaths this year have been reported in Piura. A total of 44,971 dengue fever cases have been seen in the country to date, while 26,453 cases were reported in all of 2016. Dengue serotypes 2 and 3 are currently circulating in the country. Outbreak News Today
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