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Three taken to hospital after letter opened at Virginia military base

27 February - Eleven people fell ill and three were transported to a hospital on Tuesday after a letter was opened at a U.S. military base in Arlington, Virginia, the fire department and a base spokeswoman said. "Someone opened a letter and everyone at the office started feeling badly," said Leah Rubalcaba, a spokeswoman for Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. The three people taken to a hospital were in stable condition, Arlington Fire Department said on Twitter. The letter was opened in the Marine Corps’ portion of the base, which is located near Washington. “An envelope containing an unknown substance was received” at the base, the Marine Corps said on Twitter. “Personnel in the affected building took immediate preventative measures by evacuating the building,” it said. MSN

Trump hints at allowing more troops to carry personal weapons on military bases

23 February - President Donald Trump on Friday said he would re-examine federal policies restricting troops from carrying private firearms on military bases, calling it an important safety issue. But Defense Department leaders have in the past resisted widespread changes to those firearms policies because of concerns it could lead to more accidental shootings and successful suicides. ... “We’re going to look at that whole military base gun-free zone,” he said. “If we can’t have our military holding guns, it’s pretty bad. ... Trump specifically referenced the July 2015 shooting spree at a pair of military facilities in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in which a gunman killed four Marines and a sailor in a series of ambushes. The attacker was later killed in a firefight with police. ...“He wouldn’t have had a chance if these world-class marksmen had, on a military base, access to their guns.” Reports following the deaths of the service members found that at least two military personnel on scene were carrying personal firearms when they were attacked — possibly in violation of base rules — and unsuccessfully returned fire in an effort to stop the gunman. Military Times

Update: Malaria, U.S. Armed Forces, 2017

February 2018 - ... In 2017, a total of 32 service members were diagnosed with or reported to have malaria, which is the lowest number of cases in any given year during the 10-year surveillance period. The relatively low numbers of cases during 2012–2017 mainly reflect ... a reduction due largely to the progressive withdrawal of U.S. forces from [Afghanistan.] The percentage of cases of malaria caused by unspecified malaria species (53.1%; n=17) in 2017 was the highest during any given year of the surveillance period. The percentages of cases caused by Plasmodium
### Classified Version of the Weekly Update

An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the **SECRET** level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site: [http://phc.army.smil.mil](http://phc.army.smil.mil)

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

To access this version, you will need a **SECRET** clearance and a SIPRNet account.

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**vivax** (15.6%; n=5), *P. falciparum* (25.0%; n=8), and by *P. malariae* (6.3%, n=2) remained similar to those of the preceding 4 years, although the numbers of cases decreased. Malaria was diagnosed at or reported from 19 different medical facilities. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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**VA is trying new ways to treat TBI and PTSD**

26 February - The VA is examining two alternative treatments for TBI and PTSD: a light-emitting diode (LED) treatment for mild to moderate TBI and stellate ganglion block (SGB) for PTSD. In the LED treatment, which takes about 30 minutes, a lightweight LED-lined helmet is placed on the patient’s head, and more diodes are placed inside the nose to deliver photons to the deeper parts of the brain. The light is painless and generates no heat. … The LED light has been shown to boost the output of nitric oxide, improving blood flow. Studies have shown that LED improves brain function, including attention and memory, emotions, and sleep. … SGB may ease anxiety and the alert response by inhibiting connections between the peripheral sympathetic nerve system and regions of the cerebral cortex, such as the amygdala, thought to be abnormally activated in PTSD. [Federal Practitioner](#)

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**Veterans in army's chemical experiments say time is running out**

28 February - For decades during the Cold War, the Army carried out chemical and biological testing experiments on more than 7,000 of its own soldiers at the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. The GIs — all volunteers — were sworn to secrecy and told they would experience no long-term health effects. Some soldiers tested protective clothing, while others were exposed to nerve agents, mustard gas, and psychoactive drugs with no plan for follow-up care. … [When the veterans] applied for VA disability benefits, [they were] rejected. … In 2013, a federal court ruled that the Army had to notify veterans of possible long-term health effects from their time at Edgewood. That same court later required the Army to provide them with medical care as well. … [T]he Army said notifying vets isn’t as easy as it sounds. Bill Fitzhugh, who is the program director of the medical care injunction for participants of chemical or biological substance testing programs at the Army Public Health Center, said the Army first has to validate where veterans are before releasing any private health information. [Texas Public Radio](#)

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**White House receives Mattis memo on transgender troops**

24 February - The White House has received a memo from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis making recommendations for dealing with transgender individuals serving in the military.
Trump gave Mattis six months to develop proposals for transgender individuals currently serving. Officials are not revealing Mattis’ recommendations to the president. The Pentagon sent the memo to President Donald Trump by courier Friday. That from principal deputy press secretary Raj Shah. Military Times

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GLOBAL

Lost art of bending over: how other cultures spare their spines

26 February - To see if you’re bending correctly, try a simple experiment. “Stand up and put your hands on your waist,” says Jean Couch, who has been helping people get out of back pain for 25 years. ... "Now imagine I've dropped a feather in front of your feet and asked to pick it up," Couch says. "Usually everybody immediately moves their heads and looks down." ... "You've already started to bend incorrectly — at your waist," Couch says. "Almost everyone in the U.S. bends at the stomach." In the process, our backs curve into the letter "C" — or, as Couch says, "We all look like really folded cashews." ... But in many parts of the world, people don’t look like cashews when they bend over. ... [In Liberia] women working in their gardens ... had striking silhouettes: They were bent over with their backs nearly straight. But they weren't squatting with a vertical back. Instead, their backs were parallel to the ground. They looked like tables. ... "It's called hip hinging," [Stuart] McGill says. "And I've spent my career trying to prove it's a better way of bending than what we do." NPR

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NIH researchers find a potential treatment for disorders involving excess red blood cells

26 February - Researchers at the National Institutes of Health have cured mice with Chuvash polycythemia, a life-threatening disorder that involves the overproduction of red blood cells. They treated the mice using Tempol, an experimental drug being studied for treatment of diabetes, cancer and other diseases. The findings offer hope that Tempol or a similar drug may treat polycythemias that affect humans, such as mountain sickness -- a serious blood complication experienced in low-oxygen, high-altitude settings. NIH

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Sea swimming 'increases illness risk'

27 February- Swimming in the sea substantially increases the chance of developing stomach bugs, ear aches and other illnesses, researchers have found. ... [They] concluded, compared
to non-sea swimmers, the likelihood of developing an earache increases by 77% and for a gastrointestinal illness rises by 29%. As well as swimming, the risks also apply to water sports, such as surfing. Researchers reviewed 19 studies linking sea bathing to illness from the UK, US, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark and Norway. They analysed results from more than 120,000 people. ... "We think that this indicates that pollution is still an issue affecting swimmers in some of the world's richest countries." BBC News

Standing desks may not be as good for health as thought

27 February - ... Standing desks may not be the boon to health some thought they'd be. Standing next to your desk can create “discomfort and deteriorating mental reactivity,” which can lead to other problems with health and productivity, researchers report in a recent study published in the journal Ergonomics. The new finding is contrary to previous research suggesting that sitting at a desk for too long can lead to long-term health problems. ... "Prolonged standing discomfort increased (all body areas), reaction time and mental state deteriorated while creative problem-solving improved," the researchers wrote in the new study. "Prolonged standing should be undertaken with caution." UPI

They're hosting parasitic worms in their bodies to help treat a neglected disease

1 March - Seventeen volunteers in the Netherlands have agreed to host parasitic worms in their bodies for 12 weeks in order to help advance research toward a vaccine for schistosomiasis, a chronic disease that afflicts more than 200 million people a year, killing thousands, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and South America. “Yes it sounds odd and crazy. The idea of having a worm grow inside you is awful,” says Meta Roestenberg, an infectious disease physician at Leiden University Medical Center, who is directing the research. But she said the risk to the student volunteers is “extremely small,” especially compared with the potential benefit to preventing a disease that burdens millions of the world’s poorest people. A Dutch ethics board agreed. The New York Times

When wildfire smoke invades, who should pay to clean indoor air?

25 February - As dense smoke from regional wildfires spread through communities across western Montana last summer, public health agencies faced an indoor problem, too: Residents suddenly needed filters to clean the air inside homes and public spaces, but there was no obvious funding source to pay for it. Ellen Leahy, the health officer in charge of the Missoula City-County Health Department, says in the past, when wildfire smoke polluted the air outside, nobody really talked about air filters. “We’d always told people to go indoors, thinking the air might be a little better,” Leahy says. "Well that was not necessarily true anymore." The size and proximity of fires, coupled with weather trends and local
topography, led to an inversion layer of dirty air that hung around communities for weeks on end. Without air filtration systems, it invaded indoor spaces too. NPR

INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 7:
- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity continued to decrease in most states, but a third of the states continued to have moderate to high activity.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity remained similar to last week with Italy continuing to have moderate activity.
- PACOM: Influenza activity in PACOM remained similar to last week, except for the Republic of Korea where activity decreased to moderate.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Due to issues in receiving TMDS data, the data are not available this week for CENTCOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Due to issues in receiving TMDS data, the data are not available this week for CENTCOM.

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 17 February 2018 (week 7):
The overall number of positive specimens continues to decrease in week 7, however, the number of positive influenza B specimens has remained steady since week 5, ranging from 643 – 637 positive specimens. The number of hospitalizations reported in Disease Reporting System internet (DRSi) has decreased from week 6 from 20 to 10. So far this season, 20% (27) of all hospitalized cases were reported as vaccinated; the average number of days from the date of vaccination to the date of diagnosis is 66 days with a median of 5 days. Outpatient influenza-like illness has also decreased by 14% since last week. Regardless, several more months of flu season remain.

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

During week 7 (February 11-17, 2018), influenza activity remained elevated in the United States.
- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus subtype reported by public health laboratories during week 7 was influenza A(H3). The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories remained elevated.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was above the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.
- Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths: Thirteen influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. CDC

Department of Defense Global, Laboratory-based Influenza Surveillance Program’s influenza vaccine effectiveness estimates and surveillance trends for 2016–2017 influenza season

January 2017 - ... The influenza vaccine reduced the odds of medically attended, laboratory-confirmed influenza by 48% among all dependents. The VE for this season was slightly lower than for the 2015–2016 season, which had a 63% (95% CI: 53%–71%) adjusted VE. Several factors could explain the lowered VE for this season. During the 2016–2017 season, the predominant influenza strain was A(H3N2), which differed from the 2015–2016 season when influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 predominated. Also, the live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) was found to be ineffective during the 2015–2016 season. Therefore, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices did not recommend the use of LAIV during the 2016–2017 season. In summary, the 2016–2017 season had a predominant influenza strain of A(H3N2) and peaked at week 7 for A(H3N2). The adjusted VE for the 2016–2017 season was 48% protective against all types of influenza. The limitations of the VE analysis have been described elsewhere. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 7/2018 (12-18 February 2018):
- Influenza activity was widespread in the majority of reporting countries, with overall 51% of individuals sampled from primary healthcare testing positive for influenza. The detection rate decreased slightly compared to the previous week (53%).
- Both influenza virus types A and B were co-circulating with a higher proportion of type B viruses. Different proportions of circulating influenza virus types and A subtypes were observed between countries.

The majority of severe cases admitted to non-ICU hospital wards were adults infected by influenza type B viruses. The majority of severe cases admitted to ICU were adults infected mostly by influenza type A viruses. European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO
NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

22 February - Febrile respiratory illness cases:
  - Military Recruits - 49 positive of 73 tested
  - CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 105 positive of 162 tested
  - DoD Beneficiaries – 23 positive of 39 tested.

Naval Health Research Center

NIAID unveils strategic plan for developing a universal influenza vaccine

28 February - Developing a universal influenza vaccine — a vaccine that can provide durable protection for all age groups against multiple influenza strains, including those that might cause a pandemic — is a priority for the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). ... NIAID officials detail the Institute's new strategic plan for addressing the research areas essential to creating a safe and effective universal influenza vaccine. They describe the scientific goals that will be supported to advance influenza vaccine development. The strategic plan builds upon a workshop NIAID convened in June 2017 that gathered scientists from academia, industry and government who developed criteria for defining a universal influenza vaccine, identified knowledge gaps, and delineated research strategies for addressing those gaps. NIH

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

During 4 February - 17 February 2018 (Surveillance Weeks 6 & 7), a total of 1,536 specimens were collected and received from 70 locations. Results were finalized for 1,421 specimens from 70 locations. The percent influenza positive for Week 6 and 7 were both 40%. The influenza percent positive for the season is approximately 37%.

U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

European surveillance shows high levels of drug resistance in zoonotic bacteria

27 February - A surveillance report today from European health and food safety agencies indicates that antibiotic resistance in zoonotic bacteria from humans, food, and animals on
the continent remains at high levels, with notable levels of multidrug resistance in two common causes of foodborne illness in humans. The report is based on 2016 data provided by 28 EU member states and jointly analyzed by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). It addresses resistance in bacterial isolates of zoonotic *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* from humans, food, and poultry, along with resistance levels and mechanisms in indicator *Escherichia coli* and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in animals and food. CIDRAP

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**FDA finds hazards lurking in parsley, cilantro, guacamole**

23 February - Last fall, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration started looking for dangerous bacteria in a few of America's most beloved fresh foods: parsley, cilantro, basil, and prepared guacamole. The very freshness of these foods carries a risk. Since they aren’t normally cooked, they may harbor nasty bugs like *Salmonella* and *Listeria monocytogenes*. The testing has barely begun, but the agency has released the first results, revealing that it has, in fact, discovered disease-causing microbes in a small percentage of those samples. Out of 139 samples of fresh herbs tested, four tested positive for *Salmonella* and three contained disease-causing *E. coli*. ... The FDA tested 107 samples of processed avocado and guacamole, divided roughly equally between domestic and foreign suppliers. ... Four samples tested positive for disease-causing *Listeria*. NPR

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**Multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Montevideo infections linked to raw sprouts (final update)**

28 February - CDC public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration investigated a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Montevideo infections. Ten people infected with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Montevideo were reported from three states.

- No hospitalizations and no deaths were reported.

Epidemiologic evidence indicated that raw sprouts were the likely source of this multistate outbreak.

- Ill people in this outbreak reported eating raw sprouts on sandwiches served at Jimmy John’s restaurants in Illinois and Wisconsin.
- One ill person in this outbreak reported eating raw sprouts purchased from a grocery store in Minnesota.

This outbreak appears to be over. CDC

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**Multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Typhimurium linked to chicken salad**

22 February - CDC recommends people do not eat recalled chicken salad sold at Fareway
Plastic additive BPA not much of a threat, government study finds

23 February - ... A two-year government study of rats found that even high doses of the plastic additive [BPA] produced only "minimal effects," and that these effects could have occurred by chance. The finding bolsters the Food and Drug Administration's 2014 assessment that water bottles and other products containing BPA are not making people sick. ... The study's findings are at odds with claims by advocacy groups that exposure to BPA is associated with a wide range of health effects including cancer, obesity and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. NPR

Clean Label Project finds lead in many brands of protein powder

28 February - The Clean Label Project has studied 134 protein powder products made by 52 different brands. They screened the products for contaminants and toxins, including heavy metals such as lead, pesticides, and others that are linked to cancer. ... You can see the ratings of the protein powders at their site. They found that 70% of the powders contained lead, 74% contained cadmium, and 55% contained BPA, a hormone disruptor. Others contained arsenic, another heavy metal. Food Poisoning Bulletin

F.D.A. to expand medication-assisted therapy for opioid addicts

25 February - In an effort to encourage new treatments for opioid addiction, the Food and
Drug Administration plans to begin permitting pharmaceutical companies to sell medications that help temper cravings, even if they don't fully stop addiction. The change is part of a wider effort to expand access to so-called medication-assisted treatment, or MAT. The agency will issue draft guidelines in the next few weeks. ... The new approach was signaled Saturday by the health and human services secretary, Alex M. Azar II, in remarks to the National Governors Association. Mr. Azar said the agency intended “to correct a misconception that patients must achieve total abstinence in order for MAT to be considered effective.” The New York Times

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Fewer Americans think smoking a pack a day poses a great health risk

27 February - About 3 out of 4 Americans agree that smoking cigarettes causes health problems, but public perception of the risks posed by smoking may be declining, according to a Duke Health study. ... From 2006 to 2015, the number of Americans who said smoking a pack or more per day posed a great health risk dropped by 1 percent, which represents more than 3 million Americans. So far, the change in perceived risk has not appeared to result in more smokers. During the same period, smokers in the U.S. dropped from 20.8 percent to 15.1 percent, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But it could signal a potential slowing of progress. "That's 3 million people who might be more likely to start smoking, go back to smoking, or who are less likely to quit if they already smoke," said Lauren Pacek, Ph.D., the study's lead author and an assistant professor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke. Science Daily

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More fitness, less fatness

26 February - ... As Americans have gained extra pounds in recent decades, Mary A. Burke, an economist ... says they seem to have adjusted to a new normal regarding weight. A study she and co-authors published in 2010 revealed that a growing proportion of overweight adults — 21 percent of women and 46 percent of men (up from 14 percent and 41 percent, respectively, in the 1990s) — consider their weight "about right." And a study published in JAMA last year found that fewer adults who were overweight or obese were trying to shed excess pounds. Public health experts fear that this trend toward “fat acceptance” bodes ill for future well-being and the soaring costs of chronic weight-related ailments like heart disease, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes and more than a dozen kinds of cancer. The New York Times

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No downturn in obesity among U.S. kids, report finds

26 February - Hopes were dashed this week that the United States was finally making progress in the fight against childhood obesity. Contrary to previous reports, the epidemic of fat has not abated. In fact, there's been a big jump in obesity among the nation's
youngest children, according to the latest analysis of federal data. ... The latest analysis shows that the percentage of children ages 2 to 19 who are obese increased from 14 percent in 1999 to 18.5 percent in 2015 and 2016. Moreover, there was no statistical difference in the overall obesity rate between the 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 surveys — undercutting hopes that obesity had begun to decline in recent years. In fact, the scientists say, there was a disturbingly large increase in obesity among the youngest children — ages 2 to 5 years old. In that age group, obesity increased from about 9 percent to almost 14 percent. NPR

Olympians are using nonalcoholic beer as recovery drinks. Here's the science

24 February - ... Today's Olympians have been swept up in a new trend largely emerging from Bavaria: nonalcoholic athletic recovery beers. ... Beer's most oft-cited health benefits revolve around plant-derived compounds called phenols. ... On the whole, phenol-rich diets tend to lower inflammation and reduce the risk of sickness. ... If athletes drink beer, they won't get properly hydrated. That is because water, when drunk in large quantities, is quickly expelled without electrolytes. According to [Ben] Desbrow, our bodies can easily hold water and properly rehydrate when we take in calories as we drink — but athletes can't eat before every new match, round, bout or run. One of the benefits of sugary recovery drinks is that they restore athletes' stores of glycogen. NPR

Opioids and methamphetamine: a tale of two crises

24 February - The unchecked acceleration of opioid-related deaths in the USA is, by many measures, the worst of times. Prescriptions peaked in 2012 at more than 255 million (81.3 per 100 persons), then subsequently declined by about 15%. Yet the rate of opioid-related deaths has continued to rise. In the grim ranking of overdose deaths, illegally manufactured fentanyl and analogues have made the most drastic gains, claiming over 20,100 Americans in 2016. Deaths from natural and semisynthetic opioids, such as oxycodone and morphine, remain exceedingly high (14,400). But while the opioid crisis has exploded, the lull in the methamphetamine epidemic has quietly and swiftly reversed course, now accounting for 11% of the total number of overdose deaths. The Lancet

Pediatricians call for universal depression screening for teens

26 February - Only about 50 percent of adolescents with depression get diagnosed before reaching adulthood. And as many as 2 in 3 depressed teens don’t get the care that could
help them. ... To address this divide, the American Academy of Pediatrics has issued updated guidelines this week that call for universal screening for depression. "What we're endorsing is that everyone, 12 and up, be screened ... at least once a year," [Rachel] Zuckerbrot says. The screening, she says, could be done during a well-visit, a sports' physical or during another office visit. ... The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force also recommends depression screening, and many pediatricians have already woven the screenings into their practices. NPR

Vaping may increase risk of pneumonia, says new study

1 March - People who smoke e-cigarettes might have an increased risk of developing pneumonia because the vapor could help bacteria stick to cells lining the airways, a small experiment suggests. ... [R]esearchers did a series of laboratory experiments to see whether exposure to e-cigarette vapor might increase levels of a molecule produced by airway lining cells, called platelet-activating factor receptor (PAFR). Pneumococcal bacteria use PAFR to help them adhere to airway cells. ... [T]hey exposed mice to e-cigarette vapor and found higher PAFR production in the rodents who inhaled the fumes. Finally, the researchers asked 17 people who were regular vapers to come smoke an e-cigarette in the lab. Compared with these participants' PAFR levels measured before the vaping session, there was a three-fold increase in PAFR levels an hour after people smoked e-cigarettes. Fox News

Gambia: Rift Valley fever

26 February - On 3 January 2018, the Ministry of Health (MoH), Senegal notified WHO of a case of Rift Valley fever, a 52-year-old Korean man who was a resident of Gambia. The case was reported from a hospital in Dakar. ... On 10 December, while being in Bissau ... the case developed symptoms, including a dry cough, fever, headache and joint pain. ... On 25 December, he entered into a coma and was medically evacuated to a hospital in Dakar, Senegal. ... He experienced a recurrence of haemorrhagic symptoms on 31 December 2017 and died that same day. A blood sample from the case was tested at the Institute Pasteur in Dakar and was positive for IgM against Rift Valley fever virus. ... Rift Valley fever outbreaks are uncommon in Gambia and its neighbouring countries. The most recent human case reported in the Gambia occurred in 2002. Currently, there is no indication of a risk of a Rift Valley fever outbreak in Gambia, Senegal or Guinea-Bissau. WHO
Kenya: Chikungunya outbreak strikes Kenya's second-largest city

27 February - The WHO today said a chikungunya outbreak that began in the middle of December in Mombasa, Kenya's second-largest city, has so far sickened 453 people, with 32 of the cases confirmed by lab tests. This is the first time that active chikungunya circulation has been confirmed in Mombasa, which has a population of 1.2 million and is rapidly growing, leading to overcrowding. The WHO said numerous dump sites, inadequate drainage, and stagnant water offer ample breeding sites for the mosquitoes that transmit the disease. The WHO also said vector-control programs are inadequate.

CIDRAP News Scan (second item)
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Liberia: Evaluating Ebola - Liberian health care four years after the crisis

20 February - Nearly four years have passed since the beginning of the deadly outbreak of Ebola virus in Africa in 2014. ... A new study by Bradley H. Wagenaar and colleagues attempted to understand the long-term effects of the epidemic on health care systems. The researchers analyzed seven years of routine health information system data from public health care providers across Liberia, using indicators of primary care such as vaccines, clinic visits, pre- and post-natal care, and malaria treatments, to determine how the outbreak affected access to health care for people without Ebola. They found that by September 2014, these health services had decreased by as much as 67 percent compared to the month preceding the outbreak. The researchers found that the crisis accounted for 776,110 missed clinic visits and nearly 100,000 missed malaria treatments. Though the primary health care system had recovered to pre-outbreak levels by November 2016, it is still unknown how the disruption in services due to the virus will affect health outcomes for years to come. PLOS

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Mozambique: Living and dying on a rubbish dump - the landfill collapse in Mozambique

26 February - Last Monday at 3am, rain pummelled Mozambique's capital. „„ In Hulene, an impoverished neighbourhood 10km from the city centre, lies the Hulene dump: a 17-hectare (42-acre) mountain of rubbish that towers 15 metres above the people who have made their homes on its fringes. “It was late and the rain was pouring down, but I was woken up by something that sounded like an explosion,” says Paulina Cosa, a resident of the settlement. The overnight downpour set off an avalanche of rubbish that consumed more than 10 houses on its periphery, killing 16 people and wounding six others. ... Recovery operations have now stopped and, three days after the collapse, earth-moving equipment pushes back the mounds of rubbish to reclaim the 100 or so metres of land that was swallowed up by the detritus. ... [A]ll residents at the site of the collapse have been
relocated to a temporary shelter in the Ferroviario neighbourhood, about 30 minutes south of the dump. The Guardian

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Nigeria: No one's quite sure why Lassa fever is on the rise

23 February - Since the beginning of the year, there's been a particularly large outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria’s southern provinces. As of February 18, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) reports 913 cases of Lassa fever and 73 deaths. That's compared with 733 cases and 71 deaths in all of 2017. ... Lassa fever, named for the Nigerian town where it was discovered in 1969, generally breaks out during the dry season, between October and early March. It's not clear why this year's outbreak is bigger than usual. ... The rats that spread Lassa fever are native to many regions of West Africa. Nigeria's news has pushed Ghana's Health Services to caution health-care providers about Lassa fever, but no cases have appeared there. ... Examining data on climate change, population growth and land use, [Lina Moses] suggests that the annual number of Lassa fever cases could potentially double by 2070. NPR

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Nigeria: Progress toward poliomyelitis eradication — Nigeria, January–December 2017

2 March - In August 2015, the World Health Organization removed Nigeria from the list of polio-endemic countries because of the high likelihood that endemic wild poliovirus (WPV) circulation had been interrupted in Nigeria. However, during August and September 2016, four WPV cases were reported in Borno State, a northeastern Nigerian state experiencing protracted insurgency. No WPV cases have been reported since September 2016. New strategies implemented by the Nigeria polio program have helped improve polio eradication activities, including those in areas with security challenges. However, approximately 28%–45% of eligible children living in the inaccessible areas have not been vaccinated, and surveillance has not been feasible in insurgent-controlled areas of Borno State. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

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Syria: 'Gas attack' kills child in Eastern Ghouta

26 February - Health officials in the rebel-held enclave of Eastern Ghouta are accusing Syrian government forces of using chlorine gas in their aerial bombardment campaign in the Damascus suburb. Syria's Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets, said on Sunday that at least one child died as a result of suffocation on their official Twitter account. According to the Syrian opposition's interim government, victims were showing symptoms "consistent with exposure to toxic chlorine gas". The opposition's health ministry said in a statement that several people were admitted to medical facilities in nearby Al-Shifoniya. Symptoms include "dyspnea, intensive irritation of the mucus membrane, irritation of the eyes and dizziness", the ministry said. At least 18 people were treated with oxygen nebulising sessions, the statement added. Al Jazeera top of page...

Yemen: Free clinic opens for Yemenis impoverished by war

27 February - Volunteer doctors are offering free medical services for a week at a clinic in the Yemeni capital Sanaa to treat people impoverished by a war which has killed thousands and wrecked the economy. The initiative, dubbed "Breeze of Hope," is the first by a group of nurses and doctors to conduct electrocardiograms, x-rays and other procedures that Sanaa residents cannot afford. ... Mohammed al-Aqabi, the head of the initiative, said the help provided rare hope amid the gloom of war. The organizers say they hope to repeat the initiative elsewhere in the capital and in other areas of the country soon. Reuters top of page...

Yemen: Yemen's cholera epidemic likely to intensify in coming months: WHO

26 February - The World Health Organization warned on Monday that a cholera epidemic in Yemen that killed more than 2,000 people could flare up again in the rainy season. WHO Deputy Director General for Emergency Preparedness and Response Peter Salama said the number of cholera infections had been in decline in Yemen over the past 20 weeks after it hit the 1 million mark of suspected cases. "However, the real problem is we're entering another phase of rainy seasons," Salama told Reuters on the sidelines of an international aid conference in Riyadh. "Usually cholera cases increase corresponding to those rainy seasons. So we expect one surge in April, and another potential surge in August." Reuters top of page...
Spain: Local transmission of malaria in Madrid

1 March - An autochthonous, or locally transmitted case of malaria is being investigated in a 3-month-old baby at the University Hospital of Móstoles in the Community of Madrid, according to a Radio Madrid report (computer translated). The investigation into the case shows that the baby has not been in a malaria endemic area. According to hospital sources, the little girl was admitted to the hospital about a month ago for some other ailment and yesterday the Public Health Directorate of Madrid had proof of diagnosis. A working group has been created consisting of the people in charge of the Madrid hospital and Public Health to determine how contagion has occurred. "Outbreak News Today"

United Kingdom: Millennials 'set to be fattest generation'

26 February – UK millennials are on track to be the most overweight generation since records began, health experts say. Based on population trends, more than seven in every 10 people born between the early 1980s and mid-90s will be too fat by the time they reach middle age. In comparison, about half of the "baby boomer" generation, born just after World War Two, were fat at that age. Being fat as an adult is linked to 13 different types of cancer, says Cancer Research UK, who did the analysis. … Britain is the most obese nation in Western Europe, with rates rising faster than in any other developed nation. Obesity prevalence has been increasing in the UK, from 15% in 1993 to 27% in 2015. BBC News

United Kingdom: U.K. study deems 20% of primary care antibiotics inappropriate

28 February - At least 20% of all antibiotics prescribed in UK primary care could be classified as inappropriate, according to new research published by Public Health England (PHE). … While the amount of inappropriate prescribing varied widely, all practices included in the analysis were found to prescribe antibiotics when they weren’t necessary. … In 2016, the British government called for cutting the amount of inappropriate antibiotic prescribing by general practitioners (GPs) in half by 2020. The authors say that, to meet that goal, they first needed to quantify the extent of the problem. A similar study was conducted in 2016 by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with the same purpose. That study found that approximately 30% of all oral antibiotics prescribed in US outpatient settings are inappropriate. "CIDRAP"
USNORTHCOM

U.S.: CDC requests funds to build new maximum-security laboratory

24 February - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is asking Congress for money for a new building to house the laboratories that work on the deadliest pathogens known to humankind. The existing building, which went into service in 2005, will need to be replaced by 2023 or so to avoid major disruptions in the work, senior agency staff told STAT. “The concerns are that the facility we’ve been in now is beginning to show signs of age,” said Dr. Inger Damon, head of the division of high consequence pathogens and pathology. That division works on viruses like smallpox and Ebola, which can only be studied in laboratories of the highest biosafety and biosecurity ratings, BSL4. PBS NewsHour

U.S.: HHS unveils Title X grant process for 2018 after delay

26 February - The Trump administration on Friday announced the beginning of this year's application process for family planning providers to receive crucial federal funding from the Title X program. Officials said the funds will be distributed in September, raising questions as to how some recipients will make do when their current grants are set to expire at the end of March. HHS' acting deputy assistant secretary for population affairs, Valerie Huber, assured reporters on Friday that family planning clinics that provide abortion services will be eligible for the new funding under the new guidelines. Huber said the HHS wants to expand the program to include entities and services that may have not been eligible for funding in the past. ... Eligible services for grant funding include family planning services that offer "natural family planning methods" or "fertility awareness," a family-planning technique that tracks a woman's ovulation to avoid pregnancy. The method has a failure rate of up to 25%, according to information on HHS' website. Modern Healthcare

U.S.: National Science Foundation to close its overseas offices

26 February - A plan by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) to close its overseas offices ... is getting mixed reviews in the scientific community. Last week, NSF announced it would shutter its outposts in Beijing, Brussels, and Tokyo by summer; two U.S. staff will return to the agency's headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, and local staff will be reassigned to U.S. embassies. The change reflects a desire for NSF to be "more strategic and focused" in its international affairs, says Rebecca Keiser, head of NSF's international office. ... The office websites claim they were instrumental in fostering international cooperation in ocean drilling, earthquake engineering, studies of gravitational waves, and academic exchange.
U.S.: Transgender surgeries are on the rise, says first study of its kind

28 February - In the first broad demographic study of trends in gender-affirming surgeries in the United States, researchers found that the number of operations increased fourfold from 2000 to 2014. Some of the significant rise, according to a study published Wednesday in the journal JAMA Surgery, may be related to an increase in insurance coverage for the procedures. ... [Brandyn] Lau and other researchers from Johns Hopkins Medicine and Harvard University analyzed 15 years of data from the National Inpatient Sample, a collection of hospital inpatient information from across the country, and found a total of 4,118 gender-affirming surgeries. The Washington Post

U.S.: Uber Health lets doctor's offices order patients a ride

1 March - Have a doctor's appointment on your calendar but no way to get there? Uber just launched a new service that may solve that problem. Dubbed Uber Health, the service lets healthcare professionals order their patients a ride. More than 100 U.S. healthcare organizations – "including hospitals, clinics, rehab centers, senior care facilities, home care centers, and physical therapy centers" – have already been using the new service as part of a beta program, Uber Health General Manager Chris Weber wrote in a blog post. "Every year, 3.6 million Americans miss doctor appointments due to a lack of reliable transportation," Weber pointed out. ... With Uber Health, healthcare professionals can schedule rides for their patients to take immediately, or up to 30 days in the future. Fox News

USPACOM

China: Experts warn meningococcal group B meningitis and septicemia is increasing in China

28 February - An international group of expert scientists, doctors and public health officials has reported that cases of meningococcal group B meningitis and septicemia (MenB) are increasing in China, and have recommended that an effective MenB vaccination strategy should be in place in preparation for a potential outbreak of the disease. ... [T]he types of meningococcal disease affecting people in China is changing. Rates of MenA have significantly declined following the introduction of the MenA polysaccharide vaccine in the 1980s, however there is the emergence of new clones of MenB and MenC and a new threat is the international spread of a particularly deadly strain of MenW. Outbreak News Today
Papua New Guinea earthquake: 'Catastrophic' strongest quake on record kills 'at least 16' people

28 February - A devastating 7.5-magnitude earthquake has hit Papua New Guinea, causing landslides, levelling homes and killing at least 16 people. The country's strongest earthquake on record has also caused power outages, destroyed road links and created communication problems making it difficult to assess the extent of the damage. The earthquake's epicentre was at the edge of the country's mountainous Southern Highlands region, 55 miles from Porgera the site of one of the world's largest goldmines which employs over 2,500 people. Independent

USNS Mercy deploys in support of Pacific Partnership 2018

1 March - The hospital ship USNS Mercy departed its home port of San Diego Feb. 23 in support of the 13th Pacific Partnership mission. Pacific Partnership is the Navy's humanitarian and civic assistance mission. ... The Mercy will visit Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam from February through June to provide medical, dental, veterinary, public health services, engineering and disaster response to host countries who have invited the ship to visit and provide services to the local population. More than 800 military and civilian personnel from Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Peru Singapore, South Korea and the United Kingdom will join allied and partner nations for the mission. Health.mil

Brazil: Brazil battles yellow fever — and a ‘dangerous’ anti-vaccination campaign

18 February - ... Brazil is suffering one of its worst outbreaks of yellow fever, a potentially lethal mosquito-borne virus. ... The escalation has prompted a chaotic rush to vaccinate tens of millions of people through the public health system. ... But even as the vaccination campaign expands, so does an anti-vaccine movement fueled by Internet rumors. “We’re seeing fake news about yellow fever spread at an alarming rate on social networks,” said Igor Sacramento, a health communication researcher at Fiocruz, one of Brazil’s largest scientific institutes. ... “This movement is very dangerous,” said Pedro Tauil, an epidemiologist and professor emeritus at the University of Brasilia. “We need to show people that vaccination is the best prevention — because it’s not just about individual protection, it’s also about preventing the virus from spreading to a full-blown epidemic.” The Washington Post
Latin America and the Caribbean have the second highest adolescent pregnancy rates in the world

28 February - Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be the region with the second highest adolescent pregnancy rate in the world, according to a joint report launched today by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The report highlights recommendations to reduce teen pregnancy. ... The global adolescent pregnancy rate is estimated at 46 births per 1,000 girls, while adolescent pregnancy rates in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to be the second highest in the world, estimated at 66.5 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the report. PAHO