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- Syria: WHO demands access to Syria’s east Ghouta to bring medical aid
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- U.S.: EPA denies petition to ban pesticide chlorpyrifos
- U.S.: Firearm-related hospitalizations cost U.S. billions
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- U.S. (New Jersey): Water-borne chemicals near military base exceed EPA health guidelines
- U.S.: OHSHN now tracking sharps injuries and blood and body fluid exposures
- U.S.: Research grants target of Trump’s new $1.2 billion NIH budget cuts
- U.S.: States give new parents baby boxes to encourage safe sleep habits
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- Australia: Cyclone Debbie - deadly storm batters Australia
- Cambodia: Cambodia bans breast milk exports
- China: Progress and challenges in maternal health in western China - a Countdown to 2015
**Technical Guide 146: Guide for Handling, Reuse, and Disposal of Chemically Treated Wood Material**

This technical guide is an aid for determining proper handling, reuse, and disposal practices for chemically treated wood items generated by Department of Defense (DOD/DoD) activities, primarily of wooden pallets and ammunition boxes, railroad ties and crossarms, utility poles, and construction and demolition debris. These items may contain Federal or State regulated hazardous constituents depending on the chemical wood preservative used (i.e., arsenic, chromium, copper, cresols (constituents of creosote), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and PCP).

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**USSOUTHCOM**

- PAHO reports more than 200 new chikungunya cases
- Suriname: Yellow fever
- Venezuela: Venezuela's Maduro asks U.N. to help ease medicine shortages
- Venezuela: Starving Venezuelans dying for eating poisonous yucca sold in black market

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**U.S. MILITARY**

**Air Force special ops medics to test freeze-dried plasma on the battlefield**

26 March - ... [M]edics carry [plasma], in frozen form, on the battlefield. [T]he Defense Department is working on bringing freeze-dried plasma to the U.S. This type of plasma doesn't need to be kept cold and is also more stable than frozen plasma. Since the Food and Drug Administration hasn't approved a U.S.-sourced product yet, the military is using French-manufactured freeze-dried plasma. ... [The] chief of AFSOC’s medical modernization, said the command will receive 25 units of the product from France under the FDA’s Investigational New Drug protocol. *Air Force Times*

**Diagnoses of traumatic brain injury not clearly associated with deployment, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2001–2016**

March 2017 - From 2001 through 2016, a total of 276,858 active component service members received first-time diagnoses of traumatic brain injury (TBI). Person-time and incident cases of TBI were assigned to one of three groups. *Group 1* included only service members’ person-time before their first-ever deployments. *Group 2* included service members’ person-time during their overseas deployments and the 30 days after their return from deployment. *Group 3* included only service members’ person-time more than 30 days after return from deployment. The crude overall incidence rate of TBI among deployed service members (1,690.5 cases per 100,000 person-years [p-yrs]) was 1.5 times that of service members in group 1 (1,141.3 cases per 100,000 p-yrs), and 1.2 times that of service members in group 3 (1,451.2 cases per 100,000p-yrs). The portion of the surveillance period during which the annual incidence rates of TBI in groups 3 and 2 exceeded the rates in group 1 likely represents, at least in part, the increased risk of service in an active combat zone. *Medical Surveillance Monthly Report*

**Lawmakers take aim at tobacco use among troops, veterans**

29 March - ... At a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.,
blasted Pentagon leaders for a lack of leadership on [tobacco use], saying not enough is being done to discourage the use of tobacco products among young service members. A recent department study noted that 38 percent of smokers in the military started after they enlisted. ... Recent studies have found that about 25 percent of troops smoke cigarettes compared with about 20 percent of civilians. Roughly 13 percent use smokeless tobacco products compared with 3 percent of civilians. ... “We're trying to get after that,” said Lt. Gen. Nadja West, Army surgeon general. “There is no minimum daily requirement for tobacco products. Anything we can do from a medical standpoint to educate ... we try to push that.” Military Times

Once a fixed issue, the VA disability claims backlog is on the rise again

24 March - The number of backlogged veteran's benefits claims is rising again. Veterans Affairs officials insist it’s only a temporary problem, due to an unexpected rise in the number of new cases that flooded into the system over the last few months. They’re confident the 30,000-case increase in the backlog since last fall will be brought back down again in coming weeks. But to do that, they’re also instituting mandatory overtime for claims processors for the fourth year in a row, a practice that in the past has raised questions about whether VA officials have enough capacity to handle the ever-increasing number of benefits cases. Military Times

Opioid abuse tied to higher suicide risk in veterans

24 March - While drug and alcohol problems are associated with a higher risk of suicide among veterans, the increased danger is particularly high with opioid abuse, a U.S. study suggests. Overall, male veterans with drug or alcohol problems are more than twice as likely to die by suicide as other ex-service members, researchers report in the journal Addiction. For female veterans with substance use disorders, the odds of death from suicide are almost six times higher. The suicide risk is particularly high when veterans misuse prescription sedatives, with more than quadrupled odds of suicide for men and more than 11 times the risk for women, the study also found. Among female veterans, opioids were also tied to a nearly eight-times-higher risk of suicide, while amphetamines and stimulants were tied to almost six times the risk. Reuters

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GLOBAL

A radical new therapy could treat the 'untreatable' victims of trauma

23 March - ... The Comprehensive Resource Model (CRM) was developed over the past
decade by Lisa Schwarz, a licensed psychologist in Pennsylvania who has practiced for 30 years. Fusing elements of psychology, spirituality, neurobiology and shamanic "power animals," Schwarz has taught the technique to more than 1,500 therapists around the world, including more than 350 in Scotland, where CRM is being used at rape crisis centers and a private in-patient trauma clinic. The therapy has also been embraced by several psychiatrists with the state-run National Health Service, including Dr. Alastair Hull, one of Britain’s top PTSD specialists, who leads NHS psychotherapy services for almost 400,000 people and runs a clinic devoted to treating traumatic stress. Newsweek

British scientists in world-first TB breakthrough
24 March - British scientists have made a world-first breakthrough in the diagnosis of tuberculosis. Researchers in Oxford and Birmingham say they can isolate different strains of the disease using a process called genome sequencing. It means patients who may have waited months to get the right drugs can now be diagnosed in just a few days - so they have a greater chance of recovery. … Cases of TB in the UK have begun falling recently, but England still has one of the highest rates in Europe. BBC News

Chemical disinfectants and sanitizers linked to thyroid cancer
30 March- Workers exposed to chemicals like deodorizers, sanitizers, disinfectants and sterilizers on the job may be more likely than other people to develop thyroid cancer, a recent study suggests. Occupational exposure to these chemicals, known as biocides, was associated with a 65 percent higher risk of thyroid cancer, the study found. For people whose jobs might have led to the most cumulative exposure to biocides over time, the odds of thyroid cancer was more than doubled. The study also looked at pesticides, and didn’t find an increased risk of thyroid cancer linked to these agricultural chemicals. Reuters

Discovery enables 'mass produced blood'
24 March - Scientists say they have made a significant leap towards mass-producing red blood cells suitable for donation. Red blood cells can already be made in the lab, but the problem is scale. A team at the University of Bristol and NHS Blood and Transplant have developed a method to produce an unlimited supply. The artificial blood will be far more expensive than conventional donation. So it is likely to be used for people with very rare blood types. The old technique involved taking a type of stem cell that manufactures red blood cells in the body and coaxing it to do so in the lab. However, each cell eventually burns out and produces no more than 50,000 red blood cells. The trick developed by the Bristol team was to trap the stem cells at an early stage where they grow in number indefinitely. BBC News

ECDC says MDR-TB cases in African migrants have risen to 25
27 March - European health officials report that 25 cases of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) among migrants from the Horn of Africa appear to be part of a chain of recent
transmission. In a rapid risk assessment issued today, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) reports that whole-genome sequencing (WGS) analysis indicates that all 25 cases belong to a single cluster and differ by only one single nucleotide polymorphism, an indication of recent transmission from a common source of infection.

According to the ECDC report, available data suggest the origin of the cluster strain stems from the Horn of Africa. All cases have a recent history of migration from Somalia (22), Eritrea (2), and Ethiopia (1).

How Tetris therapy could help patients
28 March - ... Prof Emily Holmes, an expert in psychology at the University of Karolinska ... has just published a study that shows Tetris therapy may lessen the psychological impact of traumatic events. Her team at the University of Oxford gave Tetris therapy to patients admitted to a large UK hospital emergency department in a state of shock following road traffic accidents. The patients were asked to visualise the crash they had just encountered and then begin playing Tetris on a Nintendo console. Twenty minutes of game play appeared to be enough of a distraction to stop disturbing memories of the accident being formed. Prof Holmes explains: "Our findings suggest that if you engage in very visually demanding tasks soon after a trauma, this can help block or disrupt the memory being stored in an overly vivid way." ... In the study, the group of patients who had the Tetris therapy were far less likely to experience troublesome flashbacks of their accident than those who did not receive this intervention.

Lung probe 'to help cut the unnecessary use of antibiotics'
30 March - A lung probe that diagnoses bacterial infections could prevent unnecessary use of antibiotics in intensive care units, researchers believe. The fibre-optic tube can show within 60 seconds whether a patient needs to be treated with the drugs. It is hoped the Proteus technology could tackle the emergence of bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics. ... Proteus uses chemicals that light up when they attach to specific types of bacterial infection. This fluorescence is detected using fibre-optic tubes that are small enough to be threaded deep inside patients' lungs.

New budget test puts UK on front line in global drug price fight
27 March - ... For the last 18 years Britain has led the way in measuring drug cost-effectiveness in a rational and dispassionate way, using a model of economic benefits developed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). ... The new rules mean drugs costing NHS England more than 20 million pounds ($25 million) a year will no longer get automatic funding, even if they are cost-effective. Instead, firms will have to haggle to get them used, resulting in a potential delay of three years. Peter Johnson, professor of medical oncology at the University of Southampton, fears his patients may lose out on a wave of costly new immunotherapy drugs that are starting to transform treatment.
Paralysed man feeds himself with help of implants

29 March - A paralysed man has been able to feed himself by using his thoughts to send messages from implants in his brain to ones in his arm. ... Researchers say this is the first time anyone has been able to restore brain-controlled reaching and grasping in a person with complete paralysis. But the technology is a long way from being used outside the lab. ... For the study, he had surgery to place sensors in the motor cortex area of his brain, the area responsible for hand movement. He then spent four months using the sensors to command movements of a three-dimensional virtual arm. After this, he had 36 electrodes implanted in his arm and hand to electrically stimulate his hand, elbow and shoulder muscles. The researchers used a decoder to translate his brain signals into commands for the electrodes in his arm. He was then able to intuitively command his arm to move.

BBC News

Studies show single-dose potential for new malaria drug

29 March - Two human challenge studies on a new malaria drug called DSM265 yielded promising data about safety and dosage and how the drug might fit in to strategies to prevent and treat infections, a pair of research groups reported yesterday. ... Over the past 15 years, malaria levels have steeply dropped, but resistance to first-line drugs is threatening progress toward eliminating the disease. Among several new drugs being studied, DSM265—which blocks a key Plasmodium biosynthesis enzyme—is one of the few long-acting new antimalarials in clinical trials. ... The relatively short protection period makes it unlikely to be used as prevention for pregnant women and children in endemic area, but if the dose can be optimized to allow weekly use ... it might be a candidate for travelers, possibly replacing mefloquine.

CIDRAP

Telehealth doctor visits may be handy, but aren't cheaper overall

26 March - ... [Are telehealth appointments] cheaper than in-person visits, as the telehealth companies claim? Not necessarily, according to a study published this month by the RAND Corporation. ... The study found that total annual spending, which the researchers defined as costs to insurers and out-of-pocket payments by patients, was $45 more per patient for people who used telehealth to treat acute respiratory illnesses than it was for patients who saw doctors for the same conditions. That's because 88 percent of the telehealth visits represented people who would not have gone to a doctor otherwise. ... Just 12 percent of the telehealth sessions, the researchers concluded, amounted to a substitute for going to see the doc. ... And patients who get advice via a virtual appointment may be more likely to be scheduled for an in-person follow-up appointment.

NPR
Transplanted eyes let tadpoles see from their tails

30 March - ... If you transplant an eye onto what will become the tadpole's tail, that organ — misplaced though it may be — can allow the animal to see. ... [Researchers] say their research doesn't just have implications for scientists' ability to restore vision; it also sheds light on how to connect implants and grafts to the body's own wiring. ... [Douglas] Blackiston and [Michael] Levin wanted to see whether they could get a transplanted eye to produce a network of nerves that would connect up to the central nervous system. ... Some of the tadpoles got a dose of a human migraine medicine called zolmitriptan, which the researchers thought might promote nerve growth; other tadpoles just got the plain old salty water that they are usually kept in. ... [T]he ones that got the graft and the medication were able to detect the red, and would wriggle their way into another patch of color. They were also able to follow moving triangles, reversing direction when the shapes did, much as they would if they were swimming along with a group. STAT

U.S.-U.K. alliance targets the world's deadliest superbugs

30 March - Eleven biotech companies and research teams in Britain and the United States were awarded up to $48 million in funding on Thursday to speed development of new antibiotics powerful enough to take on the world's deadliest superbugs. The range of antimicrobial medicines able to kill the growing number of drug-resistant infections is dwindling and health experts warn that within a generation the death toll from such "superbug" infections could reach 10 billion. Announcing its first funding, a new U.S.-U.K. alliance known as CARB-X, short for Combating Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria Biopharmaceutical Accelerator, said it would invest an initial $24 million in 11 biotech companies pursing various projects to develop antibiotics and diagnostic. Another $24 million will be given in staged payments over three years as projects progress. Reuters

ZIKA VIRUS

Living with Zika in Puerto Rico means watching, waiting and fearing judgment

27 March - ... Since Zika appeared in Puerto Rico more than a year ago, doctors believe as many as a million people on the island have been infected. Some 40,000 of those cases have been confirmed, a number that includes some 3,200 pregnant women. Doctors in Puerto Rico are just beginning to assess the long-term consequences for children born to mothers with Zika. ... [E]ven in cases where babies appear normal, their brains show lagging growth. ... [W]omen who have babies with birth defects have been reluctant to go public because, like HIV, Zika carries a stigma. [Dr. Carmen] Zorrilla has heard comments like, "Oh, you were not protecting yourself?" "You were not using the mosquito repellent?" or "You
Prior exposure to dengue or West Nile could make Zika worse: report

30 March - Prior infection with West Nile or dengue - two viruses closely related to Zika - can make Zika symptoms worse, U.S. researchers said on Thursday. The findings in mice, published in the journal Science, confirm studies in cells suggesting that prior infection with dengue could worsen the effects of Zika. That could explain higher rates of severe Zika side effects, such as the birth defect microcephaly, in areas such as Brazil, where dengue is common. It also raises concerns about current or experimental dengue vaccines by Sanofi, Takeda Pharmaceutical Co, GlaxoSmithKline and others because they could inadvertently make Zika infections worse. ... [Researchers] found that mice injected with antibodies from either virus were more likely to die from Zika or have more severe symptoms than mice exposed to Zika alone. Symptoms were worst among Zika-infected mice that were given dengue antibodies, with only 21 percent of the mice surviving. That compared with survival rates of 93 percent among mice infected with Zika alone. Reuters

Why were there fewer microcephaly cases from Zika last year?

29 March - ... [A] letter to the New England Journal of Medicine offers a theory for how to explain the missing microcephaly cases, the babies that were predicted to be born in Northeastern Brazil after Zika’s second wave of infection in the early part of 2016. The authors suggest the region’s first wave of Zika may have been its only wave of Zika to date. Something that caused similar illness, likely the chikungunya virus, was probably responsible for the high level of fever and rash illnesses Brazil recorded in 2016, they theorized. ... In 2015, a large spike in [Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS)] cases was followed about 23 weeks later by a wave of microcephaly births. But a corresponding spike in GBS cases in early 2016 was not. ... “This is not a statement of fact and proof. This is the best hypothesis,” said Christopher Dye, senior author and an epidemiologist with the WHO. “The cases in the first year, back in 2015, were really Zika cases. And that’s why we saw the microcephaly in 2015. But in 2016, it was predominantly chikungunya, not Zika, and that’s why we saw Guillain-Barré, but not microcephaly.” STAT

INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 11:
- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity decreased to minimal to low for most of the country.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity was minimal across EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal across PACOM except for the ROK which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity was minimal for locations with available data in CENTCOM and AFRICOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity was minimal in Honduras this week based on DMSS data. DHA - Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 18 March 2017 (Week 11)

- Influenza A activity in Army and civilian populations is decreasing, as is the number of specimens tested.
- ILI Activity: The number of Army ILI (influenza-like illness) outpatient visits in week 11 was 3% lower than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: One hospitalized influenza-associated case was reported to APHC through DRSi in week 11 in a non-AD beneficiary.
- Viral specimens: During week 11, 644 of 2220 (29%) lab specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. Of 354 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-A reported 200 (56.5%), followed by RHC-C (129, 36.4%), RHC-P (20, 5.6%), and RHC-E (5, 1.4%). CENTCOM did not report any positive influenza A specimens. APHC

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

During week 11 (March 12-18, 2017), influenza activity decreased, but remained elevated in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus subtype reported by public health laboratories during week 11 was influenza A (H3). 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 above the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.
- Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths: Two influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. CDC

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 11/2017 (13 - 20 March 2017)

- Influenza activity across the region continued to decrease with the great majority of countries reporting low intensity.
- The proportion of influenza virus detections among sentinel surveillance specimens continued to decrease, to 17% from 22% in the previous week.
- This was the first week during the season that the proportion of type B viruses
exceeded the proportion of type A viruses in sentinel detections, as is commonly seen in the second half of an influenza season. However, the overall number of type B detections remained low. European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For 2017 Week 11 (through 18 March 2017):
- Influenza: Four cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at Fort Benning, MCRD Parris Island, and CGTC Cape May.

Naval Health Research Center

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

During 5 - 18 March 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 10 & 11), a total of 429 specimens were collected from 47 locations. Results were finalized for 270 specimens from 43 locations. During Week 10, one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 & influenza B, 59 influenza A(H3N2), and 31 influenza B viruses were identified. During Week 11, two influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, 33 influenza A(H3N2), and 31 influenza B viruses were identified. Approximately 34% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 10. Approximately 42% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 11. The influenza percent positive for the season is approximately 36%.

US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Canada's 25-case E coli outbreak linked to Robin Hood flour

29 March - A four-province outbreak that has now expanded to 25 Escherichia coli infections has been tied to Robin Hood flour, which has been recalled, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) said in an update yesterday. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has issued a food recall of original Robin Hood All Purpose Flour, which has been distributed in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. "The investigation is ongoing and it is possible that additional products linked to the outbreak investigation may be identified," PHAC said. CIDRAP News Scan (sixth item)
Initiative enlists farmworkers to fight foodborne disease

24 March - The Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) is a new effort to use produce workers to spot potential foodborne disease problems in the field and subsidize them for their work. ... Produce workers are often the first to come in contact with potential sources of food pathogens, including animal droppings, unhygienic equipment, or a lack of hand-washing stations. EFI certifies farms to reward (and not penalize) their workers for calling out any potential problems. In the past, farmworkers have said speaking out would have cost them their jobs. A farm earns EFI certification when workers and management take classes on conflict resolution. So far, Costco and Whole Foods Market have agreed to pay more for EFI foods without raising the retail value, with profits going directly to farmworkers. EFI began in 2014 and in 2016 expanded into Mexico. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

Norovirus-contaminated oysters sicken hundreds in Canada, USA

29 March - Consumption of raw or undercooked oysters from British Columbia is blamed for 321 cases of norovirus gastroenteritis in three Canadian provinces, according to an updated report from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), released March 27. The outbreak, which has affected residents of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, began in December 2016 and is ongoing. Food Safety News

Study finds accurate food safety advice sorely lacking in cookbooks

28 March - The lack of food safety steps on TV gourmet food shows has been widely noted. Now cookbooks join the list, as a new study found that only 6% of recipes in bestselling cookbooks accurately advise readers to safely cook dishes containing meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs to a certain temperature—results that haven’t changed in 25 years. In the study ... the experts dissected 1,497 recipes from 29 cookbooks that appeared on the New York Times best-sellers list. All recipes involved handling raw animal ingredients. They found that only 123 recipes (8%) mentioned cooking the dishes to a certain internal temperature. But the temperature cited in 34 of those recipes was inadequate to kill pathogens according to US government standards, so in fact only 89 recipes (6%) contained sound food safety advice on internal temperature. CIDRAP News Scan (sixth item)

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A staggering increase in U.S. heroin use has hit young, white men the hardest

30 March - Heroin use — which has been at the epicenter of a ruthless and relentless opioid epidemic sweeping the country — has increased fivefold over a decade, and dependence on the drug has tripled, researchers say. A major study released Wednesday found that the sharpest increase in heroin use and addiction was among young, white men with lower education and income levels. ... [M]en ages 25 to 44 accounted for the highest heroin-related death rate (13.2 per 100,000) in 2015 — a 22 percent rise from the previous year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ... [More] than half of them — 53 percent of them — said they had used prescription opioids before. The Washington Post

Army develops new nutritional bed-time snack bar for basic trainees

23 March - The Military Nutrition Division at the U.S. Army’s Research Institute of Environmental Medicine has unveiled a new nutritional snack bar for recruits to consume before bedtime while at basic combat training. Military health experts have found that recruits often arrive to basic with poor vitamin D status, making their bones more vulnerable to fracture and injury, according to the Military Health System. This subsequently leads to delays in training and increased dropout rates. ... The new nutritional snack bar developed at the Natick facility boosts calcium and vitamin D levels, helping to prevent bone injuries. “Our test soldiers eat these bars each evening,” McClung said, “and we are seeing marked improvements in their nutritional status and their bone health.” Military Times

Childhood obesity: Cut unhealthy food multi-buy offers

27 March - The government must do more to reduce the number of cut-price and multi-buy offers on unhealthy food to help curb childhood obesity, a group of MPs say. ... In the latest Health Select Committee report, MPs made further calls for curbs on big discounts and price promotions on unhealthy food, citing evidence from the food industry that responsible retailers were being disadvantaged by those who continued to offer discounts on food high in sugar and fat. BBC News

"Depression: let’s talk" says WHO, as depression tops list of causes of ill health

30 March - Depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. According to the latest estimates from the World Health Organization, more than 300 million people are now living with depression, an increase of more than 18% between 2005 and 2015. Lack of support for people with mental disorders, coupled with a fear of stigma, prevent many
from accessing the treatment they need to live healthy, productive lives. ... Said WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan: “These new figures are a wake-up call for all countries to re-think their approaches to mental health and to treat it with the urgency that it deserves.” One of the first steps is to address issues around prejudice and discrimination.

WHO

Keep watch for these three new labels on packaged foods

27 March - ... [New] front-of-the-package emblems [are] nongovernment, third-party-authorized stamps that tell us at a glance that a product meets a specific set of standards. These logos, such as the American Heart Association’s Heart-Check mark on packaged foods and the Certified Humane seal on eggs, meat and dairy, are designed not only to help consumers navigate the store more easily but also to incentivize companies to produce goods that meet the desired criteria. Keep your eyes peeled, because three new food emblems have launched recently that could not only help you make better choices and get out of the store faster but also help improve the foods that make it to grocery shelves. The Washington Post

More evidence linking stress to obesity

30 March - Using hair to measure long-term levels of the stress hormone cortisol, UK researchers confirm the link between chronic stress and packing on pounds, as well as difficulty shedding excess weight. Previous research has tied high levels of the stress hormone cortisol in the blood, urine or saliva to obesity, but these measurements can vary based on factors like the time of day and don't capture long-term stress levels, the study team notes in the journal Obesity. Reuters

Night-time loo trips 'linked to salt in diet'

26 March - People who wake at night with an urge to go to the loo may need to cut back on salt in their diets, doctors from Japan are suggesting. The problem - called nocturia - which mainly affects the over-60s, leads to disrupted sleep and can significantly affect people’s lives. In a study of more than 300 volunteers, researchers found that reduced salt intake led people to urinate less. ... The researchers... followed patients who had a high salt intake and sleeping problems for three months, after giving them advice to cut back on salt in their diet. On average, trips to the loo fell from more than twice a night to just one. BBC News

Screening for excessive alcohol use and brief counseling of adults — 17 states and the District of Columbia, 2014

31 March - ... Findings from a 5-question module on alcohol screening and brief intervention (ASBI) using Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey data from 17 states and the District of Columbia in 2014 indicate that only one in three binge drinkers was asked about alcohol use (in person or on a form) and advised about risky drinking
levels. Further, only one in six binge drinkers was asked about alcohol use (in person or on a form) and advised to reduce their drinking by a health professional. Continued work at the health systems and individual practice levels is needed to implement ASBI per the [U.S. Preventive Services Task Force] recommendation. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Update

Testosterone therapy is popular, but studies are mixed

28 March - ... Scientists followed 790 men age 65 and older who had blood testosterone levels below 275 nanograms per deciliter of blood, well below the average for healthy young men and lower than would be expected with normal aging. The men also had symptoms reflecting their low hormone levels, like loss of sex drive. Half the participants were treated with testosterone gel, and half were given a placebo gel. The studies reported mixed results, finding that over the yearlong study period, testosterone therapy corrected anemia, or low levels of red blood cells, which can cause fatigue, and increased bone density. But a study to see if testosterone improved memory or cognitive function found no effects. Meanwhile, a red flag warning of possible risks to the heart emerged from the studies: Imaging tests found a greater buildup of noncalcified plaque in the coronary arteries of men treated with testosterone for a year, an indicator of cardiac risk, compared with those who were given a placebo gel. The New York Times

Would legalizing medical marijuana help curb the opioid epidemic?

27 March - In states that legalized medical marijuana, U.S. hospitals failed to see a predicted influx of pot smokers, but in an unexpected twist, they treated far fewer opioid users, a new study shows. Hospitalization rates for opioid painkiller dependence and abuse dropped on average 23 percent in states after marijuana was permitted for medicinal purposes, the analysis found. Hospitalization rates for opioid overdoses dropped 13 percent on average. At the same time, fears that legalization of medical marijuana would lead to an uptick in cannabis-related hospitalizations proved unfounded, according to the report. Reuters

USAFRICOM


30 March - Understanding Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) transmission in dromedary camels is important, as they constitute a source of zoonotic infection to humans. ... A relatively high MERS-CoV RNA rate was detected in Ethiopia (up to
15.7%) followed by Burkina Faso (up to 12.2%) and Morocco (up to 7.6%). The RNA detection rate was higher in camels bred for milk or meat than in camels for transport as well as in younger camels. High seropositivity rates were found in Morocco and Ethiopia, followed by Burkina Faso. Seropositivity rates were higher in large/medium herds (≥51 camels) than small herds, in camels raised for meat or milk than for transport, and in nomadic or sedentary herds than in herds with a mix of these lifestyles. Eurosurveillance

Burundi: Malaria outbreak kills over 4,000 in Burundi this year

29 March - An outbreak of malaria has killed over 4,000 people in Burundi so far this year, the United Nations said Wednesday, a dramatic rise over the 700 victims the government announced just two weeks ago. There have been over 9 million cases of malaria in the East African nation since January 2016, according to the report by the U.N. humanitarian office. ... The malaria cases are “well beyond the epidemic threshold,” the report said, citing World Health Organization investigators. ... The U.N. estimates that the number of people affected by food insecurity increased from 2.1 million to 3 million between October and January, the report said. AP

Nigeria: Meningitis outbreak kills at least 140 in Nigeria

28 March - An outbreak of meningitis in several states of Nigeria has killed at least 140 people, officials say. It has been reported over the last week in six states and has so far infected more than 1,000 people, the Abuja Centre for Disease Control says. ... The disease is spreading amidst fears it could be out of control if refugee camps, prisons and police cells become affected through crowds, the BBC’s Chris Ewokor in Abuja says. Vaccination is an effective way of preventing against meningitis. However, a new strain, which may have been imported from a neighbouring country is now prevalent in Nigeria and requires a different type of vaccine, Nigerian Minister of Health Isaac Adewole said. BBC News

Somalia: As cholera spreads, Somalia begins vaccination campaign

27 March – Somalia ... is starting a major effort to vaccinate 450,000 people against its latest plague: cholera. ... The world’s largest refugee camp complex in Dadaab, Kenya, contains 260,000 Somali refugees who fled the civil war in the 1990s or subsequent floods and famine. Now about three million people in Somalia face starvation caused by a long drought. The New York Times

West Africa: Lassa fever in West Africa - outbreaks confirmed in 5 countries

27 March - Lassa fever outbreaks have been confirmed across five West African countries, including Nigeria, Benin, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Burkina Faso. In Nigeria, the index case emerged on 16 December 2016 in Ogun state. ... Between 16 December 2016 and 19 March
2017, a total of 283 suspected cases including 56 deaths (case fatality rate of 19.8%) have been reported. ... The outbreak of Lassa fever in Benin started on 12 February 2017 from Tchaourou district, Borgou province, close to the border with Nigeria. ... On 23 February 2017, another suspected case from L’Atacora province was reported. ... In Togo, Lassa fever was confirmed on 23 February 2017, with the case having established epidemiological linkage to Benin. ... On 26 February 2017, the Ministry of Health of Burkina Faso notified WHO of a confirmed Lassa fever case admitted in a hospital in the northern part of Togo. ... Sierra Leone has been reporting sporadic suspected cases of Lassa fever since 28 December 2016. However, the outbreak situation escalated in the months of February and March 2017 when a cluster of 24 cases were reported and investigated. Out of these, four cases were laboratory confirmed and all of them died. ... The outbreak has since subsided.

Outbreak News Today

**USCENTCOM**

Saudi Arabia: New camel-related MERS case reported in Saudi Arabia

27 March - After a week of no updates, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health (MOH) reported a new case of MERS-CoV today in a man who had direct contact with camels. The 54-year-old Saudi man lives in Al Kharj, and is in stable condition after presenting with symptoms of MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus). He had direct exposure to camels, which can transmit the disease to humans. So far Saudi Arabia has reported 1,581 MERS-CoV cases, 659 of them fatal, since the virus was first detected in humans in 2012. Ten people are still being treated for their infections, the MOH said.

CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

Syria: WHO demands access to Syria's east Ghouta to bring medical aid

27 March - The health situation is deteriorating in Syria's eastern Ghouta region near Damascus, where 300,000 people are besieged and none of the three hospitals is functioning, the World Health Organization said on Monday in a call for access to deliver aid. "Time is running out for the people of East Ghouta. As health needs increase, available resources are being depleted day by day. Our main goal now is to provide access to lifesaving care for thousands of vulnerable men, women and children immediately," Elizabeth Hoff, WHO Representative in Syria, said in a statement. The number of children suffering from trauma injuries is "alarmingly high" in eastern Ghouta - an opposition stronghold - the WHO said. Thirty percent of all patients suffering war-related injuries children under 15 years of age, the WHO said. Reuters
Yemen: Half of all health facilities in war-torn Yemen now closed; medicines urgently needed

28 March – More than 14 million people in Yemen have no access to health services, the United Nations health agency today said, warning that transportation of medical personnel and treatment for the injured is getting increasingly difficult as this week the fighting enters its third year. “More than half of all health facilities are closed or functioning only partially,” Tarik Jasarevic, a WHO spokesperson, told journalists in Geneva. Mr. Jasarevic, who was in Yemen in February, said that at least 274 health facilities had been damaged or destroyed as a result of the conflict, and some 44 health workers either killed or injured. He noted also a shortage of medicines and specialized staff, such as surgeons, many of whom have fled the country. “For more than six months, health facilities in Yemen had received no financial support to cover operational costs and staff salaries,” the spokesperson said. Malnutrition is on the rise with close to half-a-million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, with one out of every two children under the age of five stunted in their growth. ReliefWeb

Europe: Measles outbreak across Europe

28 March - Measles is spreading across Europe wherever immunisation coverage has dropped, the World Health Organization is warning. The largest outbreaks are being seen in Italy and Romania. In the first month of this year, Italy reported more than 200 cases. Romania has reported more than 3,400 cases and 17 deaths since January 2016. ... For good protection, it’s recommended that at least 95% of the population is vaccinated against the disease. But many countries are struggling to achieve that. Most of the measles cases have been found in countries where immunisation has dipped below this threshold and the infection is endemic - France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine. Preliminary information for February suggests that the number of new infections is rising sharply, says the WHO. BBC News

Sweden: The trauma of facing deportation

3 April – In Sweden, hundreds of refugee children have fallen unconscious after being informed that their families will be expelled from the country. ... [Uppgivenhetssyndrom, or resignation syndrome [is] an illness that is said to exist only in Sweden, and only among refugees. The patients have no underlying physical or neurological disease, but they seem
to have lost the will to live. The Swedish refer to them as *de apatiska*, the apathetic. "I think it is a form of protection, this coma they are in," Hultcrantz said. "They are like Snow White. They just fall away from the world." ... The apathetic children began showing up in Swedish emergency rooms in the early two-thousands. ... By 2005, more than four hundred children, most between the ages of eight and fifteen, had fallen into the condition. In the medical journal *Acta Pædiatrica*, [Goran] Bodegård described the typical patient as "totally passive, immobile, lacks tonus, withdrawn, mute, unable to eat and drink, incontinent and not reacting to physical stimuli or pain." *The New Yorker*

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**USNORTHCOM**

**U.S.: CDC updates flaccid myelitis testing, expands search for clues**

28 March - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said today that it continues to receive reports of acute flaccid myelitis (AFM) cases, and because extensive testing since 2014 still hasn’t identified a cause, it is modifying its testing protocols. After an initial surge in cases in 2014, the CDC has been probing another big rise in cases in 2016, in which 136 cases were reported in 37 states. For 2017 so far, the CDC has received information for just 1 confirmed case, according to a clinical action notice sent to health providers yesterday. ... [T]he CDC said it has expanded the search for potential causes of AFM by broadening lab approaches that test for possible infectious and noninfectious causes, including possibly immune-mediated mechanisms. **CIDRAP**

**U.S.: EPA denies petition to ban pesticide chlorpyrifos**

29 March - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said on Wednesday it had denied a petition by environmental groups that sought to ban the agricultural pesticide chlorpyrifos. In October 2015, the Obama administration proposed to revoke all food residue tolerances for chlorpyrifos, an active ingredient in insecticides. ... "By reversing the previous administration’s steps to ban one of the most widely used pesticides in the world, we are returning to using sound science in decision-making – rather than predetermined results," EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in the statement. **Reuters**

**U.S.: Firearm-related hospitalizations cost U.S. billions**

30 March - Just the initial hospitalizations for firearm-related injuries in the United States cost an average $735 million per year, with the government picking up a large portion of the tab, researchers say. Medicaid and Medicare pay 41 percent of the total, and private insurers another 20 percent, the study authors report in American Journal of Public Health. ... In 2014, firearms caused about 33,700 deaths and 81,000 nonfatal injuries in the U.S.,
U.S.: National Academies spells out strategy for eliminating hepatitis B and C

29 March - An expert task force yesterday unveiled a strategy for eliminating hepatitis B and C in the United States by 2030, which could prevent nearly 90,000 deaths by then and remove the diseases from the list of serious public health problems. ... The group emphasized that the world has the tools to prevent deaths from both diseases, including a vaccine for hepatitis B and treatments for hepatitis C. The committee projected that diagnosing 90% of chronic hepatitis B patients and treating 80% of those who warrant treatment could halve deaths by 2030. For hepatitis C, the experts said treating all infected people could cut new infections by 90% by 2030 and reduce deaths by 65% over the same period. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

U.S. (New Jersey): Water-borne chemicals near military base exceed EPA health guidelines

22 March - Two chemicals that have been linked to cancer and other diseases have been found in a Burlington County creek at 16 times the health limit recommended by the federal government. PFOA and PFOS, two of the PFC family of chemicals, were found at a combined level of 1,127 parts per trillion (ppt) in a stream that runs from a wastewater plant at the McGuire-Fort Dix-Lakehurst military base into the Rancocas Creek, a spokesman for the base confirmed. ... The chemicals, once used for products such as nonstick cookware and flame-retardant fabrics, have been phased out by manufacturers, but traces linger in places where they were used, such as Solvay Specialty Chemicals in West Deptford or the Burlington County military base, where they were a component of fire-fighting foam.

U.S.: OHSN now tracking sharps injuries and blood and body fluid exposures

29 March - NIOSH has announced it released two new modules for tracking sharps incidents and blood and body fluid exposures for healthcare workers using the Occupational Health Safety Network (OHSN). This network collects existing injury data to help identify jobs that are at the highest risk for injury within their facility. "An annual survey of OHSN users shows overwhelming support for a system that helps mitigate high-risk aspects of the healthcare industry and guides prevention efforts," said NIOSH Director John Howard, M.D. Occupational Health & Safety

U.S.: Research grants target of Trump's new $1.2 billion NIH budget cuts

28 March - More details emerged today on President Donald Trump’s proposed budget, including plans to drastically cut research grant funding to the National Institutes of Health.
NIH) in the current fiscal year, which ends in October. According to a summary obtained by Stat News, $1.2 billion of Trump's proposed $18 billion cut in federal funding will go directly reducing the money available for scientific and medical research. The amount is in addition to the $6 billion cut in NIH funding in Trump's original budget proposal announced 2 weeks ago. ... The White House also proposed a $314 million cut for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which would reduce occupational safety and public health preparedness grants and HIV/AIDS programs. Another $100 million in grants for mental health would be taken away from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

U.S.: States give new parents baby boxes to encourage safe sleep habits

26 March - The [baby box] program is a riff on Finland’s well-known baby box, or maternity package, which the government gives to expectant mothers who get a prenatal checkup: It’s the box, plus clothing, blankets and other supplies. Now that Finnish model is making inroads in the U.S., but with a twist. Instead of being a prenatal incentive, it's being used to deliver a postpartum safe sleep message. This week, Alabama will join Ohio and New Jersey in making free baby boxes available to the families of all newborns in the state. Parents watch online videos about SIDS and safe sleep and complete a short quiz. They can pick up a box at a local distribution center or have it mailed to them. The sturdy, portable box comes with a firm foam mattress and tight-fitting sheet; also included are breastfeeding accessories, a onesie, diapers and wipes. NPR

U.S.: The U.S. can't really know if farmers are cutting back on antibiotics, GAO says

24 March - New FDA rules limit how farmers can give antibiotics to animals raised for meat. But a Government Accountability Office report says the FDA doesn’t collect the data to know if that policy is working. When the Food and Drug Administration created controls in January on how farmers can give antibiotics to livestock, scientists concerned about antibiotic resistance and advocates for animal welfare called it a historic shift in how meat animals are raised. But a new federal report, released last week, says the long-awaited FDA initiative ... falls short in so many areas that it may not create the change that backers hoped for. ... [T]he report by the Government Accountability Office says the FDA is not collecting usage data that will allow it to know if its effort has been successful. NPR
Australia: Cyclone Debbie - deadly storm batters Australia

30 March - A powerful cyclone has pummelled the north-east Australian coast, causing major damage, torrential rain and power cuts to tens of thousands of homes. Cyclone Debbie made landfall between Bowen and Airlie Beach in Queensland as a category four storm, whipping gusts of up to 263km/h (163mph). It is moving inland as a category two storm but could cause damage for hours yet. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said he was aware of one death so far. Activating a disaster response plan, he stressed the picture could develop when emergency crews were able to assess the damage. BBC News

Cambodia: Cambodia bans breast milk exports

28 March - Cambodia on Tuesday banned the export of breast milk, putting a stop to the business of a U.S.-based company that had been selling the milk in the United States. The decision was welcomed by United Nations child agency UNICEF, worried at a decline in breastfeeding in Cambodia. Ambrosia Labs - known in Cambodia as Khun Meada, which means “gratitude of mothers”, had been exporting milk from more than 90 Cambodian women for more than two years. ... On its Facebook page, the company said it put the safety and well-being of donors and customers before everything. ... The post said the company would not accept donations from mothers of infants younger than six months, and that donors should pump milk no more than twice a day. Reuters

China: Progress and challenges in maternal health in western China - a Countdown to 2015 national case study

21 March - Maternal mortality declined by 8.9% per year between 1997 and 2014. After adjusting for GDP per capita, length of highways, female illiteracy, the number of licensed doctors per 1000 population, and the proportion of ethnic minorities, the maternal mortality ratio was 118% higher in the western region and 41% higher in the central region than in the eastern region. In the rural western region, the proportion of births in health facilities rose from 41.9% in 1997 to 98.4% in 2014. Underpinning such progress was the Government’s strong commitment to long-term strategies to ensure access to delivery care in health facilities ... effective referral systems for women medically or socially at high risk, and financial subsidies for antenatal and delivery care. However, in the poor western counties, substantial disparity by education level of the mother existed in access to health facility births (44% of illiterate women vs 100% of those with college or higher education), antenatal care (17% vs 69%) had at least four visits), and caesarean section (8% vs 44%). The Lancet
Myanmar: Researchers report high prevalence of MDR bacteria in Myanmar

24 March - Researchers in Myanmar are reporting high prevalence of multidrug-resistant (MDR) gram-negative bacteria among bloodstream isolates from patients at hospitals in the country's largest city. Of the 592 blood cultures processed from patients at three hospitals in Yangon from July 2014 to December 2014, 42 (7.8%) yielded gram-negative bacteria. Of the 42 gram-negative isolates, 34 were Enterobacteriaceae (20 Escherichia coli, 7 Klebsiella pneumoniae, 6 Salmonella enterica, 1 Enterobacter cloacae) and 8 were non-fermenting gram-negative bacilli. Almost 80% of the Enterobacteriaceae isolates were drug-resistant. CIDRAP Stewardship/Resistance Scan (first item)

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka dengue fever tally at 24,500

25 March - During the first three months of 2016, Sri Lanka reported less than 14,000 dengue fever case, and 2016 was one of the most active dengue years in a long time. According to the Sri Lanka Ministry of Health's Epidemiology Unit, as of Mar. 24, the island country has seen 24,562 cases, and there is a week to go. ... In all of 2016, 55,150 dengue fever cases were reported and only 29,777 in 2015. Outbreak News Today

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USSOUTHCOM

PAHO reports more than 200 new chikungunya cases

28 March - The total number of chikungunya cases in the Americas grew by 207 after leaping by more than 7,000 cases the week before, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) noted in an update late last week. The case count for 2017 has now reached 12,451, PAHO said in its Mar 17 update. Most of the new cases were in Paraguay, which noted 124 new cases and 632 total for the year. Peru had 32 new cases and 307 total, and Colombia reported 29 new cases and 328 total. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

Suriname: Yellow fever

28 March - On 9 March 2017, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) in the Netherlands reported a case of yellow fever to WHO. The patient is a Dutch adult female traveller who visited Suriname from the middle of February until early March 2017. She was not vaccinated against yellow fever. ... She experienced onset of symptoms (headache and high fever) on 28 February 2017 and was admitted to an intensive care unit ... in the Netherlands on 3 March 2017 with liver failure. The patient is currently in critical condition. ... This is the first reported case of yellow fever in Suriname since 1972. WHO
Venezuela: Venezuela's Maduro asks U.N. to help ease medicine shortages

25 March - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said on Friday he has asked the United Nations to help the South American nation alleviate medicine shortages, which have become increasingly severe as the oil-producing nation's economic crisis accelerates. Triple digit inflation and a decaying socialist economic model have left medications ranging from simple anti-inflammatory drugs to chemotherapy medication out of reach for most Venezuelans. ... The Venezuelan Pharmaceuticals Federation estimates some 85 percent of drugs are unavailable to the country's citizens. Reuters

Venezuela: Starving Venezuelans dying for eating poisonous yucca sold in black market

23 March - Tulio Linares saw four of his relatives and a neighbor die one by one in Venezuela. It all happened within a week, following a family meal where they had ingested one of the few staples that are still available and affordable in the starved nation: the starchy yucca or cassava. The explanation came in the autopsies' results. The Linares and their friend had ingested the wrong kind of yucca, the so-called bitter yucca, which is inadvertently being sold in the street as sweet yucca. The two roots are almost undistinguishable, yet one is banned from the market because it contains a component - hydrocyanic acid – that becomes poisonous if not properly processed. ... Unofficial reports count at least 29 yucca-related deaths since October, including a 2-year-old girl last week. Dozens have been intoxicated to different degrees. Fox News
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