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Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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U.S. MILITARY

Army's new maternity leave policy is now official

1 March - It's official: Soldiers will now receive up to 12 weeks of maternity leave after giving birth. That's more than double the Army's previous policy, which gave female soldiers six weeks of post-pregnancy convalescent leave. What remains unchanged are how much time new mothers have before they are deployable again and the Army's rules for new fathers. New mothers are still non-deployable for up to six months. New fathers are allowed

Collection and Submission of Body Fluids for Zika Virus Testing

Before acquiring specimens, obtain appropriate patient consent to collect and test specimens for Zika virus.

Please make sure that your state or local health department and CDC have been notified and approved receipt of all specimens before they are collected and shipped.

[Contact CDC.](#)

Submit [CDC Form 50.34](#) with all specimens. For test order name, enter "Zika virus".

[More](#)



a non-chargeable administrative absence of no more than 10 days. That time must be taken consecutively and within 45 days of the child's birth. [Army Times](#)

Veterans seek help for infertility inflicted by wounds of war

29 February - ... By law, the V.A. cannot provide in vitro fertilization, not even to a veteran like Corporal Wilson whose ability to have children was impaired by an injury sustained in the line of duty. Doctors have told him and his fiancée, Crystal Black, that in vitro fertilization is their only chance of conceiving a child. Each attempt costs more than \$12,000, and they will have to pay for it themselves. ... In January, the Pentagon announced it would begin offering troops a chance to freeze their sperm or eggs before deployment, a nod to the reality that thousands of soldiers sustain injuries that leave them unable to have children. But despite that step, a 1992 law banning the V.A. from offering in vitro fertilization remains in place, forcing those soldiers to pay for subsequent treatments out of pocket.

[The New York Times](#)

What's old is new again: Syphilis in the U.S. Army

February 2016 - ... The reemergence of syphilis in the civilian population, coupled with increases in cases in all services of the military suggests that the time has come to reevaluate the impact of syphilis on force health protection and readiness. ... The reemergence of syphilis should provide an opportunity to address concerns about STD screening surveillance, diagnostics, therapy, and prevention within the Army community. ... The behaviors and social context of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines are unique. Transmission of syphilis, as with other STDs, depends not only on the behaviors and risks of the individual, but also on the attributes, risks, and behaviors of their sexual partners. Application of new methodologies, interventions, and prevention strategies requires a detailed knowledge of the context of the sexual interactions within military populations.

[Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#) (page 2)

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GLOBAL

Certain jobs hazardous to your heart health, study finds

1 March - Your day-to-day job could influence your risk of heart disease and stroke, a new study reports. Middle-aged employees working in sales, office or food service jobs appear to have more risk factors that can harm heart health than people with professional or managerial jobs, according to the researchers. Police, firefighters, truckers and health care support workers also are more likely to have these risk factors, said lead researcher Capt.

**CDC Telebriefing:
Updates on CDC's
Zika virus response
efforts**

TOM FRIEDEN: Good afternoon. Today it's been six weeks to the day from CDC's first announcement and travel briefing about Zika. In these past six weeks we've done a lot and we've learned a lot about this unprecedented situation.

[More](#)



Leslie MacDonald, a senior scientist in the U.S. Public Health Service. People 45 and older employed in sales and office jobs more often smoke, eat an unhealthy diet, are sedentary and suffer from high blood pressure, MacDonald said. Food service employees ate worse than any other profession, while truckers and other materials transportation workers had the highest smoking rates, the investigators found. [Medline Plus](#)

Chikungunya could be misdiagnosed as dengue -- masking spread of the disease

2 March - Chikungunya, a viral disease transmitted by infected mosquitoes, could have been misdiagnosed as dengue because both have similar symptoms, according to a study published in the open access journal BMC Infectious Diseases. This could potentially result in inaccurate understanding of the prevalence of chikungunya, as well as chikungunya-dengue co-infection, with potential consequences for diagnosis, treatment and disease control. ... The researchers noted a rapid expansion in the global extent of chikungunya, misdiagnosis of which has so far obscured its true public health impact. [EurekAlert!](#)

Malaria vaccine: Army reports on 1st in-human study

28 February - Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) researchers recently published the results of testing a *Plasmodium vivax* malaria vaccine candidate in a human challenge model. ... The vaccine candidate developed by WRAIR and tested jointly with GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) to prevent vivax malaria infection is the first in-human study of its kind under an investigational new drug application with the US Food and Drug Administration. WRAIR investigators immunized 30 volunteers with three doses of the vaccine candidate. ... Immunized volunteers took part in WRAIR's well-established controlled human malaria infection (CHMI) model where they were bitten by malaria-infected mosquitoes. ... While the vaccine candidate did not prevent malaria infection, it did significantly delay parasitemia in 59% of vaccinated subjects. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Mom and dad often catch hospital errors doctors missed

29 February - Parents often catch medical errors that their child's doctor missed, according to a U.S. study that suggests families may be an untapped resource for improving hospital safety and preventing mistakes. Roughly one in ten parents spotted mistakes that physicians did not, according to the study of safety incidents observed on two pediatrics units at a hospital in Boston. ... [Dr. Alisa Khan], a pediatrics researcher ... and colleagues reviewed data on 383 kids hospitalized in 2013 and 2014. ... Overall, 34 parents (8.9 percent) reported 37 safety incidents, the researchers report in JAMA Pediatrics. When doctors reviewed these incidents, they found 62 percent, or 23 of the cases, were medical mistakes. Another 24 percent, or 9 situations, involved other quality issues. The remaining 14 percent, or 5 cases, were neither mistakes nor quality problems, the physician reviewers concluded. For the subset of cases that were medical mistakes, the reviewers found 30 percent of the incidents caused harm and were preventable. [Reuters](#)

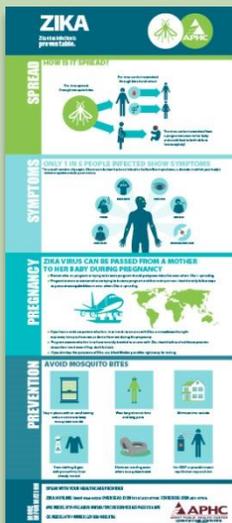
New Zika Products

New products are available for download from the APHC [Health Information Products eCatalog](#).

PowerPoint Presentation:
Know how to Protect Yourself



Infographic
Zika virus infection is preventable



Outflanking the war on drugs?

1 March - It's widely acknowledged that the "war on drugs" has failed. A militarised approach based on prohibition and incarceration has stoked staggering levels of violence and misery, cost billions of dollars, and failed to reduce either supply or demand. In April, the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) will adopt a consensus position on drug control, but few are expecting a shake-up to the current, conservative, global framework. That's why some reformers are turning to the Sustainable Development Goals as a blueprint for the future. Critics of the "war on drugs" campaign have long evoked the term "harm reduction" to lobby for a more humane approach that treats addiction as a health problem rather than a crime. They point to glaring contradictions between the current drug policy framework and the new – universally endorsed – global development agenda. Not only has the war on drugs failed, but it has also piled on more of the ills the SDGs seek to address – rights violations, mass incarceration, livelihood destruction, violence, gang warfare, weakened states, poverty, the spread of HIV, gender discrimination... the list goes on. [IRIN](#)

Risk of getting Ebola from survivors seems low, study finds

29 February - The risk of infection with the often-fatal Ebola virus from non-sexual contact with survivors seems low, researchers report. The British team analyzed nearly 6,000 articles on Ebola and found that, while the virus may be present in certain areas of survivors' bodies for an extended time, it is typically cleared from the blood within 16 days. In general, that means there is little risk of contracting Ebola from a survivor, the researchers concluded. However, an important exception is transmission of the virus through sex because Ebola remains in semen for months after a patient has recovered, the scientists added. Other than blood and semen, most other body fluids pose a low risk of transmitting Ebola, the investigators reported. However, there was too little evidence to come to a strong conclusion on breast milk, they added. [Medline Plus](#)

UN chief: Border limits violate 'human decency'

1 March - U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says border restrictions being imposed in Europe to stem the flow of migrants "are not in line with international law or with common human decency." Ban made the comments Tuesday in Madrid after Greek police said up to 10,000 mostly Syrian and Iraqi refugees were stuck at the country's Idomeni border crossing in deteriorating conditions. The Idomeni crossing has become a key flashpoint in Europe's migration crisis. Several nations led by Austria have imposed refugee caps and border restrictions over the past 10 days, creating a huge backlog of migrants in Greece. [The Washington Post](#)

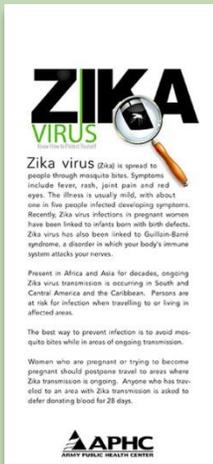
Why Ebola survivors struggle with new symptoms

2 March - ... [Many Ebola survivors] today suffer memory loss, joint pains, muscle aches and

New Zika Products (continued)

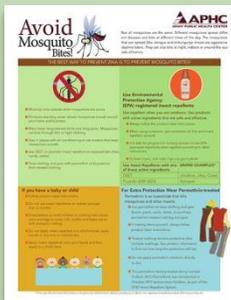
Brochure

Know how to Protect Yourself



Handout

Avoid Mosquito Bites



All APHC Zika products can be found on the [Zika Virus Hot List](#).

eye problems. These are not isolated anecdotes and vague reports. Just last week, reporting the first findings from the largest-ever study of Ebola survivors at a conference in Boston, Mosoka Fallah, an epidemiologist from Liberia, said ... 60 percent of the approximately 1,000 virus survivors in the study reported eye problems, 53 percent said they suffered muscle aches and joint pain and 68 percent reported neurological problems. When Fallah's team looked more closely at those who said they had eye problems, they found 10 percent had uveitis, a swelling of the middle layer of tissue in the eye wall. ... [Avindra Nath, a neurologist] wonders if the neurologic symptoms in Ebola survivors are a direct result of the virus or, instead, triggered by the immune system's response to the infection. [PBS Newshour](#)

ZIKA VIRUS:

C.D.C. urges pregnant women to avoid travel to Olympics over Zika fears

27 February - Health officials in the United States have advised pregnant women who are scheduled to attend the Olympic Games in Brazil to reconsider their plans because of the Zika virus epidemic. In a travel advisory released on Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said women who are pregnant in any trimester should "consider not going to the Olympics." The agency also recommended, "If you have a male partner who goes to the Olympics, either use condoms or abstain from sex for the duration of your pregnancy." [The New York Times](#)

Google says its engineers working with UNICEF to map Zika

3 March - Alphabet Inc's Google said on Thursday that its engineers were working with U.N. child agency UNICEF to analyze data in an effort to map and anticipate the spread of the Zika virus. ... Google said a volunteer team of its engineers, designers, and data scientists was helping UNICEF build a platform to process data from different sources, including weather and travel patterns, in order to visualize potential outbreaks. "The goal of this open source platform was to identify the risk of Zika transmission for different regions and help UNICEF, governments and NGOs decide how and where to focus their time and resources," the company said. [Reuters](#)

New study links Zika virus to temporary paralysis

29 February - A new study of 42 cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome in French Polynesia offers the strongest evidence to date that the Zika virus can trigger temporary paralysis, researchers reported on Monday. But experts cautioned that more evidence from other locations was needed to be conclusive. ... Guillain-Barré leaves patients unable to move, in

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>

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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

extreme cases forcing them to depend on life support. While most patients eventually regain full movement, the condition can be fatal. In the patients studied in French Polynesia, none died, but 38 percent went to an intensive care unit and 29 percent needed help breathing. This study, published in *The Lancet*, used a number of tests to try to determine whether the group of 42 patients who contracted Guillain-Barré during a Zika outbreak in 2013 and 2014 also had the Zika virus. ... [Researchers] used a gold-standard test to look for Zika antibodies. It entailed adding serum from each patient to live Zika virus in a culture, and then seeing whether the patient had antibodies to destroy the virus. All 42 patients had antibodies that killed the Zika virus. By contrast, only half of a control group of 98 people — matched for age, sex, and residence — had the antibodies. [The New York Times](#)

The answer to a Zika mystery could lie in test tubes in Colombia

29 February - ... At her lab, [researcher Beatriz Parra Patino] has been working seven days a week to prove the link between Zika and Guillain-Barre. ... [One] of the usual quick ways to check if someone has had a virus is to checking their blood for antibodies to that virus. ... But that's complicated in the case of Zika because antibodies for the virus tend to cross react with similar viruses that many people in Colombia have already been exposed to — dengue and Chikungunya, for instance. So a positive antibody test for Zika could actually just mean the person had dengue. Another option is to check the person's blood for the presence of the Zika virus itself. Here again there's an obstacle: Zika virus can only be found in the blood during an active infection. But there's a potential solution. Research suggests Zika might linger longer in other body fluids such as urine, saliva and spinal fluid. ... Thanks to this extraordinary mobilization of research, proving the Zika connection to Guillain-Barre — at least in a preliminary way — could take just a few more weeks. [NPR](#)

Zika epidemic uncovers Brazil's hidden birth-defect problem

1 March - As researchers race to establish a link between the Zika virus and a birth defect known as microcephaly, one of their biggest obstacles is the lack of reliable health data in Brazil, where the epidemic broke out there last year. Since October, Brazil's Health Ministry has received reports of about 5,600 suspected cases of microcephaly, in which babies are born with unusually small heads. ... [Given] that the country previously reported 150 such cases per year, the number would still seem to indicate a massive jump. Many doctors, though, say that the jump is largely illusory — based on massive underreporting of microcephaly and other birth defects in Brazil. ... Out of every 10,000 live births in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 2 to 12 babies are born with microcephaly. In Brazil, where care for pregnant women is much less extensive, official statistics from previous years show a rate of 0.5 per 10,000. That means the country could have thousands of undocumented cases. [The Washington Post](#)

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Zika is expected to infect 1 in 5 Puerto Ricans, raising threat to rest of U.S.

29 February - ... There are 117 confirmed cases of the virus in Puerto Rico, four times the number at the end of January. The island territory, which has a population of 3.5 million people, is "by far the most affected area" in the United States, Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said Friday. The number will almost certainly rise sharply in coming weeks, making it ever more likely that the virus will spread to the continental United States. ... The growing outbreak has laid bare how deeply Puerto Rico's debt crisis has cut public programs, including basic health and environmental control services needed to fight the virus. Most homes and public schools — and even some medical facilities — don't have window screens. [The Washington Post](#)

Zika virus infection among U.S. pregnant travelers — August 2015–February 2016

26 February - ... This report provides preliminary information on testing for Zika virus infection of U.S. pregnant women who had traveled to areas with Zika virus transmission. As of February 17, 2016, nine U.S. pregnant travelers with Zika virus infection had been identified. No Zika virus–related hospitalizations or deaths were reported among pregnant women. Pregnancy outcomes included two early pregnancy losses, two elective terminations, and three live births (two apparently healthy infants and one infant with severe microcephaly); two pregnancies (18 weeks' and 34 weeks' gestation) are continuing without known complications. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 7:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity increased to moderate and high for the majority of states.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity was minimal to low in EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity remained moderate in the Republic of Korea and low in Hawaii and Japan.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity decreased to minimal across CENTCOM and AFRICOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity in Honduras was minimal based on DMSS data.

[DHA -Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch](#)

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 20 February 2016 (Week 7), overall influenza activity continues to increase in both Army and civilian populations.

- **ILI Activity:** Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 7 were 1% lower than the same week last year.
- **Influenza cases:** Five hospitalized influenza cases were reported to APHC (Prov) through DRSi in week 7; 1 AD SM and 4 non-AD beneficiaries. Three of the cases had underlying conditions.
- **Viral specimens:** During week 7, 402 of 1413 (28%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-C reported 107 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-P reported 62, RHC-A reported 48, RHC-E reported 5, and CENTCOM reported. [APHC](#)

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

During week 7 (February 14-20, 2016), influenza activity increased in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 7 was influenza A, with influenza A (H1N1)pdm09 viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories increased.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below their system-specific epidemic threshold in both the NCHS Mortality Surveillance System and the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System. [CDC](#)

Dutch researchers note societal impact of ILI in families with preschoolers

29 February - Influenza-like illness (ILI) in preschool children has considerable societal impact in terms of healthcare consumption as well as lost work time for parents, found a Dutch study. ... Among the child-parent pairs with ILI episodes, 35.7% sought medical care for children and 17.7% for parents. Median duration of symptoms was 6 days for parents and 5 days for children. Work absenteeism was reported by 45.7% of parents with ILI (median workdays lost, 2); absenteeism from daycare was reported for 22.8% of children with ILI. ... Risk factors for ILI noted by the researchers included chronic respiratory symptoms, developmental disabilities, parental occupation in healthcare or child care, more than one child in the family, and attendance at daycare for a year or less. Daycare attendance for more than 2 years afforded some ILI protection, as did breastfeeding in infants 6 months of age or younger. [CIDRAP Flu Scan](#) (second item)

ECDC: Flu News Europe

For Week 07/2016 (15–21 February 2016):

- Twenty-eight out of 45 Member States in the WHO European Region reported

widespread influenza activity based on epidemiological data from surveillance for influenza-like illness (ILI) and acute respiratory infection (ARI).

- While seven countries reported high influenza intensity, influenza may have peaked in some parts of the Region as indicated by reports of decreasing trends in 21 countries out of 37 that reported on this indicator.
- Thirty-eight countries reported influenza virus detections in 46% of specimens from sentinel sources, indicating influenza activity in the WHO European Region. Influenza B virus constituted 43% of detections in sentinel samples, indicating a gradual shift towards influenza B. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses remained the predominant virus detected through sentinel surveillance, accounting for 86% of the A viruses subtyped.
- Cases of severe disease were fewer than in previous weeks, but varied between countries. Most severe cases were associated with A(H1N1)pdm09 and were in people aged 15-64 years. [European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO](#)

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

During Surveillance Weeks 7 & 8, 14 - 27 February 2016, a total of 363 specimens were collected and received from 50 locations. Results were finalized for 250 specimens from 46 locations. During Week 7, 51 influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, seven A(H3N2), and 14 influenza B viruses were identified. Twenty-seven influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, six A(H3N2), and 23 influenza B viruses were identified during Week 8. [US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Ciguatera fish poisoning sickens 15 in Saipan, consumption of barracuda implicated

1 March - Some fifteen people were sickened with ciguatera fish poisoning in the village of Garapan on Saipan in the Northern Marianas Islands, according to a local media report. The patients, nine of which were tourists, became ill three hours after consuming barracuda at a Chinese restaurant and food taken home. More than 400 species of fish, including barracuda, black grouper, blackfin snapper, cubera snapper, dog snapper, greater amberjack, hogfish, horse-eye jack, king mackerel, and yellowfin grouper have been implicated in this food borne illness that's relatively common in several areas of the world.

[Outbreak News Today](#)

Tunisian team identifies MCR-1 gene in poultry imported from France

26 February - A microbiological investigation of samples from Tunisian chicken farms revealed more evidence that the food animal trade is contributing to the spread of the MCR-1 antibiotic-resistance gene, according to researchers from Tunisia and France writing yesterday in *Eurosurveillance*. Chinese researchers first described the MCR-1 gene, which disables resistance to the last-line antibiotic colistin, in November. Since then, scientists in several countries have found the gene after poring through their sample collections. ... In the new study, investigators looked at 52 fecal samples collected from healthy birds in July 2015 at three Tunisian farms. ... Testing turned up 37 *E coli* isolates from 29 of the birds. ... Researchers found a high prevalence of MCR-1 and CTX-M-1-producing *E coli* at the Tunisian farms, all of which had chicken or chicks imported from France. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

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WELLNESS

How city noise affects residents' health

1 March - ... For the past year, [Erika Walker, a] Ph.D. candidate at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health has been bicycling between Cambridge, Boston, and Somerville, Massachusetts, with a decibel meter. Her aim is to measure just how loud different neighborhoods, streets, even crosswalks are. At the same time, she asks residents to fill out surveys about the impact city noises have on their lives and sanity. Walker, a Mississippi native with a background in math, economics, and furniture construction, will eventually co-analyze more than 900 surveys and 400 decibel readings to assign a noise value to individual homes. Her plan is to map perceived noise versus the reality in a handful of neighborhoods, and then measure those noise levels against certain health outcomes like cardiovascular disease.

[The Atlantic](#)

Learning a new sport may be good for the brain



2 March – ... Past neurological studies in people have shown that learning a new physical skill in adulthood, such as juggling, leads to increases in the volume of gray matter in parts of the brain related to movement control. Even more compelling, a 2014 study with mice found that when the mice were introduced to a complicated type of running wheel, in which the rungs were irregularly spaced

so that the animals had to learn a new, stutter-step type of running, their brains changed significantly. Learning to use these new wheels led to increased myelination of neurons in the animals' motor cortexes. Myelination is the process by which parts of a brain cell are insulated, so that the messages between neurons can proceed more quickly and smoothly. ... "We don't know" whether comparable changes occur within the brains of grown people who take up a new sport or physical skill, Dr. Krakauer said. But it seems likely, he said. [The New York Times](#)

More overdose deaths from anxiety drugs

25 February - Fatal prescription-drug overdoses in the United States have increased sharply in recent years. But while most of the deaths have involved opioid painkillers like oxycodone, a new study suggests that anti-anxiety medications now are playing an outsize role in overdose deaths. The number of Americans filling prescriptions for anti-anxiety drugs — benzodiazepines like Valium and Xanax that are used to treat anxiety, panic disorders and insomnia — increased 67 percent between 1996 and 2013, the study found. But the rate of overdose deaths involving these drugs increased more than fourfold. The analysis ... found that 5.6 percent of American adults filled a benzodiazepine prescription in 2013, up from 4.1 percent in 1996.

[The New York Times](#)

New, stronger FDA warning for Essure birth control implant

29 February - Federal health regulators plan to warn consumers more strongly about Essure, a contraceptive implant that has drawn thousands of complaints from women reporting chronic pain, bleeding and other health problems. The Food and Drug Administration announced Monday it would add a boxed warning — its most serious type — to alert doctors and patients to problems reported with the nickel-titanium implant. But the FDA stopped short of removing the device from the market, a step favored by many women who have petitioned the agency in the last year. Instead, the agency is requiring manufacturer Bayer to conduct studies of the device to further assess its risks in different groups of women. [The New York Times](#)

Popular smartphone app fails to measure blood pressure: study

2 March - A popular smartphone app that claims to measure blood pressure is highly inaccurate and may mislead users about their health, said a US study Wednesday. Known as Instant Blood Pressure, the app has been downloaded more than 100,000 times and is still operational, though it is no longer available for purchase, said the study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The app claims to accurately measure blood pressure "by placing a cellphone on the chest with a finger over the built-in camera lens," said the study. However, it "misses high blood pressure in eight out of 10 patients, potentially putting users' health at risk," said the study involving 85 volunteers. [Yahoo!](#)

[News](#)

Sleep munchies: Why it's harder to resist snacks when we're tired

2 March - ... [Skimping] on sleep can disrupt our circadian rhythms. Lack of sleep can also alter hunger and satiety hormones. Now, a new study finds evidence that sleep deprivation (getting less than five hours of sleep per night) produces higher peaks of a lipid in our bloodstream known as an endocannabinoid that may make eating more pleasurable. ... The new study, based on blood samples, documents a novel finding: The daily rhythm of a particular endocannabinoid, known as 2-AG, is altered by a lack of sleep. ... Generally, circulating levels of 2-AG rise slowly during the day and peak in early afternoon. But this study found that when people were sleep deprived, their 2-AG levels peaked higher and stayed elevated longer. [NPR](#)

Slice the price of fruits and veggies, save 200,000 lives?

2 March - Lowering the price of fruits and vegetables by 30 percent can save nearly 200,000 lives over 15 years — roughly the population of Des Moines, Iowa. That's the message being touted by researchers this week at the American Heart Association's Epidemiology meeting in Phoenix. ... [Computer] models suggest that making that produce more affordable may actually translate into lower death rates from heart disease and stroke. And, the researchers add, lower prices are more effective at saving lives than traditional campaigns designed to encourage consumption of fruits and vegetables, like "5 A Day." [NPR](#)

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USAFRICOM

Ethiopia: Can Ethiopia's 'secret smokers' stub out their cigarettes?

2 March - ... Cigarettes remain deeply divisive in Ethiopian culture and Addis Ababa smokers well into their 20s will not tell disapproving parents of their habit. ... [Implementing] the ban in Addis Ababa, a rambunctious city that has grown to about five million people, has not proved a simple task. A manager of one Piazza bar has felt no pressure to impose a policy that would be unpopular with his 20-something clientele: "We watched news about the ban on television and so expected it to be enforced around here, but nothing has happened." ... About 7.9% of Ethiopia's urban population and 5.5% of those in rural areas - where most people live - were smokers in 2011, according to figures from the country's Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration and Control Authority (FMHACA). [BBC News](#)

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USCENTCOM

Lebanon struggles to help Syrian refugees with mental health problems

29 February - ... More than a million Syrians have fled to Lebanon since the start of the conflict five years ago, placing a huge strain on health services in the small Mediterranean country. Up to one fifth of refugees may be suffering from mental health disorders, but gaps in Lebanon's mostly private mental health services and a major shortage of mental health professionals mean many refugees' needs are not being met. ... There is no data on the number of Syrian refugees with mental health problems, but the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates 15 to 20 percent of people in a humanitarian crisis suffer mild or moderate disorders, suggesting 200,000 Syrians in Lebanon could be affected.

[Reuters](#)

Saudi Arabia reports 5 new MERS cases

29 February - Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health (MOH) confirmed five new MERS-CoV cases today and over the weekend, including a fatal one. ... Two of the new cases, both in Riyadh, involve household contact with a previous MERS case-patient, while the other three involve contact with camels. ... The five MERS cases bring the total in the country since 2012 to 1,309, including 555 deaths. [CIDRAP](#)

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USEUCOM

United Kingdom: Law firm in new legal threat over UK air pollution

1 March - The UK government has been warned to drastically reduce air pollution or face renewed legal action. In April the Supreme Court ruled an immediate plan was needed after the UK breached EU limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). The government said it was committed to cleaning the air and had delivered its plans accordingly. But environmental law firm ClientEarth, which took the original case, said the plans still do not protect health. ... The firm has given ministers 10 days to respond. ... Nitrogen pollution from diesel vehicles is creating much of the problem - and this has been exacerbated by the scandal over testing which has made cars appear cleaner than they really are. [BBC News](#)

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U.S.: Deaths from guns and run-ins with law vary by state



1 March - Injuries that kill people across the U.S. vary widely from one state to the next. ... The states with higher than average rates of unintentional firearms deaths were Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia. None of these places are among the 18 states with legislation on the safe storage of guns, also known as child access prevention laws, the researchers note. States with unusually high rates of fatalities involving interactions with police were California, Oregon, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. While these data on these deaths isn't always accurate, one previous study of fatalities from 2010 to 2014 found these five states accounted for almost one third of so-called legal intervention deaths in the U.S. even though they only make up 16 percent of the population. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: 'Super lice' outbreak hits 25 states



26 February - A strain of so-called 'super lice' has hit a reported 25 states, causing concern and frustration among parents because the bugs can't be killed with most over-the-counter treatments. The treatments, known as pyrethroids, had a 100 percent success rate in 2000 against lice but now only work in 25 percent of cases, KSDK.com reported. A new FDA-approved treatment called AirAlle, which was developed by Lice Clinics of America, has been found to be effective against the super lice, with treatments costing about \$170. " ... A graphic from the American Chemical Society, an advocacy group for the chemical enterprise, illustrates which states have reported outbreaks, which span from the West to the Northeast and the South. [Fox News](#)

U.S.: Wisconsin investigates outbreak of *Elizabethkingia* bloodstream infections

3 March - State and local health officials in Wisconsin are investigating an outbreak of bloodstream infections caused by bacteria called *Elizabethkingia anophelis*. In addition, a team of epidemiologists and laboratory partners from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is on site assisting with the investigation. "The *Elizabethkingia* infection has been detected in 44 patients located in southeastern and southern Wisconsin. The majority of patients are over the age of 65 years, and all have serious underlying health conditions," said State Health Officer Karen McKeown. ... Illness associated with

Elizabethkingia typically affects people with compromised immune systems or serious underlying health conditions, and can lead to death. While 18 patients who tested positive for the *Elizabethkingia* infection in this outbreak have died, it has not been determined if the cause is the bacterial infection, or the patients' other serious health conditions, or both.

[Outbreak News Today](#)

U.S.: Women waiting longer to have children

29 February - American women are having their first babies at increasingly older ages. According to a recent report from the National Center for Health Statistics, the average age of first-time mothers in 2014 was 26.3, up from 24.9 in 2000. The sharpest increases in age have occurred since 2009, when the average was 25.2. But there has been a steady rise over the past four decades: in 1970, the mean age of a first-time mother stood at 21.4. The main reasons for the uptick: the decline of first births among teenagers and the increase of first births among women over age 30. Over the 14-year period examined, the proportion of first births to women younger than 20 declined 42 percent, while rising 28 percent among women ages 30 to 34 and 23 percent among women 35 and older. [The New York Times](#)

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USPACOM

India: As air worsens, New Delhi turns to masks. The flashier the better.



1 March - ... With expatriates and health-conscious Indians leading the way, residents of the Delhi metropolitan area of 25 million people are finally taking steps to protect themselves from the health-threatening atmosphere, as people in Beijing and some other heavily polluted Asian cities have already done. ... New Delhi has long been covered

with smog, but concerns escalated in early 2014, when the W.H.O. study ranked New Delhi the worst. Then the American Embassy here began making its air pollution data publicly available. A government pollution board stepped up its efforts to consistently measure and report its findings. ... In January, the government restricted private cars in New Delhi to alternate days during a two-week test. To general surprise, the city's famously lawless motorists actually followed the plan. The government plans to repeat the driving rules in April. [The New York Times](#)

India's menstruation man

1 March - ... During his research [Arunachalam Muruganantham] had learned that only ten to twenty percent of all girls and women in India have access to proper menstrual hygiene

products. ... Muruga was on mission: to produce low-cost sanitary pads for all the girls and women in his country. It was two years before he finally found the right material and another four years before he developed a way to process it. The result was an easy-to-use machine for producing low-cost sanitary pads. Imported machines cost over US\$500,000. Muruga's machine, by contrast, is priced at US\$950. Now women's groups or schools can buy his machine, produce their own sanitary pads and sell the surplus. In this way, Muruga's machine has created jobs for women in rural India. He has started a revolution in his own country, selling 1,300 machines to 27 states, and has recently begun exporting them to developing countries all over the world. [Al Jazeera](#)

Indonesia's early tsunami warning buoys down when big quake hit

3 March- All 22 of the early-warning buoys Indonesia deployed after the 2004 tsunami disaster were inoperable when a massive undersea earthquake struck off the coast on Wednesday, a National Disaster Mitigation Agency official said. The 7.8 magnitude quake did not trigger a tsunami, and there were no deaths and no major damage, but it did expose gaps in the systems put in place to prevent a disaster similar to the Indian Ocean quake that killed more than 200,000 people 11 years ago. In addition to the malfunctioning of buoys designed to warn of massive waves, authorities said there were not enough evacuation routes or shelters in Padang, a Sumatra island port city of around one million people that felt the quake. ... "But the situation has improved from previous years. People have started to understand how to evacuate safely." [Reuters](#)

Indonesia weighs controversial new drug crime penalties

28 February - ... Indonesia already has tough narcotics laws, including death by firing squad for large-scale traffickers. But the government believes more needs to be done to deter local drug use. Across Indonesia, police have stepped up raids on suspected drug dens. ... But critics say the war on drugs is only creating a climate of fear with potentially fatal consequences. Suhendro Sugiharto, an outreach worker with the Indonesian Drug Users Network, the country's biggest group of advocacy organisations, says the number of HIV infections is rising, a development he attributes to more people sharing needles. Users fear that if police catch them carrying a syringe, they could be sent to prison, he says. "We'll be facing the next HIV outbreak if this doesn't change," says Sugiharto, whose groups provide clean needles. [Al Jazeera](#)

Philippines: Teen pregnancy rates defy trend

28 February - Teenage pregnancy rates across the world have declined in the past two decades except in the Philippines, according to a new survey. The report by the UN says the Philippines topped the regional list of Asian countries that continued to have the greatest number of teenage pregnancies. It also says that one in 10 young Filipino women - between 15 and 19 years of age - is already a mother. A few factors adding to the continued increase in birth rates include having multiple sexual partners as well as low condom use. Social

attitudes towards family planning in the Philippines are heavily influenced by the Catholic Church. ... In 2012, the Supreme Court of the Philippines ruled that it was constitutional to implement the Reproductive Health Law, meaning that low-income earners had a right to family planning services and free contraception. The government says it will address the matter again after the May election. [Al Jazeera](#)

South Korea: MERS virus in Korea mutated to become less virulent

1 March - In a surprise finding, South Korean researchers observed point mutations in MERS-CoV isolates that rendered the virus less virulent as the outbreak in that country spread last year, a finding that may have ramifications for vaccine development. ... [The] mutations impaired viral fitness and virulence, rather than making the virus more virulent, or capable of causing severe disease. "This is an interesting strategy of coronavirus evolution to survive in nature and live together with the new host. The virus may tune down its power to attack for the sake of longer survival in the new host," said principal investigator Nam Hyuk Cho, PhD. [CIDRAP](#)

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USSOUTHCOM

Haiti: In Haiti, cholera quietly still kills dozens a month

3 March - Cholera, which arrived in Haiti in October 2010, has sickened more than 770,000 people, or about 7 percent of the population, and killed more than 9,200. So far this year, it has sickened more than 6,000 and is killing an average of 37 people a month. The persistence of the preventable disease has alarmed public health experts who fear that attention and resources have been diverted by newer challenges. ... World Health Organization spokesman Gregory Hartl said cholera is now considered "endemic" in Haiti. ... Others have noted the cholera bacterium now appears to be firmly established in Haiti's rivers, estuaries and even coastal waters. "Once it is established in a country's aquatic reservoir it is extremely difficult to eradicate," said Afsar Ali. [VOA](#)

PAHO reports 1,800 new chikungunya cases in the Americas

29 February - Countries and territories in the Americas reported 1,804 new chikungunya cases, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said in an update late last week. The new numbers bring the 2016 outbreak total to 18,472 confirmed and suspected cases, and the agency added 55 late-reported cases to its 2015 total, which now stands at 726,533 infections. The new cases, reported on Feb 26, bring the overall outbreak total to 1,892,631

cases. Colombia reported the largest gain last week, with 803 new cases and 6,555 for the year so far. Guatemala was next with 495 new cases and 737 total. Ecuador noted 242 new cases and 381 total, while Costa Rica reported 112 new cases, raising its 2016 total to 962. No chikungunya-related deaths have yet been reported for 2016. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

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