4 May 2018

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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Recommendations for the Use of Herpes Zoster Vaccines

Herpes zoster, also known as shingles, is a common viral disease with about one million cases each year in the United States. In October 2017, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a 2-dose, recombinant zoster vaccine (RZV, Shingrix), for the prevention of herpes zoster in adults aged ≥50 years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends Shingrix for use in immunocompetent adults age ≥50 years. During this COCA Call, clinicians will learn about CDC recommendations for herpes zoster vaccines and the clinical guidelines for the new vaccine.

Army issues waivers to more than 1,000 recruits for bipolar, depression, self-mutilation

26 April - The Army issued waivers over 13 months to more than 1,000 recruits who had been diagnosed and treated for mood disorders and 95 more for self-mutilation, according to data obtained by USA TODAY. The acceptance of new soldiers with a history of serious behavioral health issues, some of which can be lifelong challenges, came as the Army struggled to meet its recruiting goals. The time period ran from Oct. 1, 2016, through Oct. 31, 2017. Last week, Army Secretary Mark Esper indicated that the Army issues waivers only for mental health issues that have been resolved or upon further review were misdiagnosed. There were no waivers issued for a history of drug overdoses or suicide attempts. "As the stigma of seeking therapy or counseling becomes less of an issue than when I grew up, you’ll see probably more cause for waivers," Esper said. ... "We do not allow anybody in who is undergoing therapy, who is a cutter or was a cutter, identified clearly as a cutter or is using drugs. USA Today

Defense Health Agency should improve tracking of serious adverse medical events and monitoring of required follow-up

26 April - Medical errors, system vulnerabilities, or process failures can permanently or temporarily harm—or kill—patients. In military health facilities, it's critical to track and analyze these "sentinel events" to help prevent them in the future. The military services and the Defense Health Agency both track such events. Agency officials told us they spend 80 hours a month reconciling their records with the military services, but in some instances, the records don't match. The agency may be missing opportunities to make military health care safer. We recommended improving the tracking of sentinel events and follow-up requirements. GAO

DoD: At least 126 bases report water contaminants linked to cancer, birth defects

27 April - The water at or around 126 military installations contains potentially harmful levels of perfluorinated compounds, which have been linked to cancers and developmental delays for fetuses and infants, the Pentagon has found. In a March report provided to the House Armed Services Committee, the Pentagon for the first time publicly listed the full scope of the known contamination. The Defense Department identified 401 active and Base Closure and Realignment installations in the United States with at least one area where there was a known or suspected release of perfluorinated compounds. These included 36
sites with drinking water contamination on-base, and more than 90 sites that reported either on-base or off-base drinking water or groundwater contamination, in which the water source tested above the Environmental Protection Agency’s acceptable levels of perfluorooctane sulfonate or perfluorooctanoic acid, also known as PFOS and PFOAs.

Military Times
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**Ecstasy therapy may help service veterans suffering PTSD**

1 May- Combining intensive psychotherapy with a pure form of the party drug ecstasy is safe and could aid recovery in people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to the findings of a study in military veterans. Scientists who conducted the research - a small study involving just 26 people - said its results suggested that with close medical and psychological supervision, giving MDMA to PTSD patients “could enhance the benefits of psychotherapy”. ... The study is one of several mid-stage trials looking into the potential for MDMA, or 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine - the main active ingredient of ecstasy - to be used alongside psychotherapies in people suffering combat trauma and PTSD. Reuters
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**Pentagon chief calls sexual assault a cancer in military**

27 April - Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has ordered all members of the Defense Department to re-double their efforts to aggressively work to prevent and respond to sexual assaults across the military. In a memo released Thursday, Mattis said that officers and commanders must act as substitute parents for their young troops, charging leaders to “use their authority and force of personality to prevent and eliminate sexual assault from our ranks.” His memo comes amid revelations that reports of sexual assaults across the military jumped by nearly 10 percent in 2017. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Mattis said Thursday that sexual assault is a cancer in the ranks and that he discussed the issue with senior leaders. Military Times
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**Pentagon’s focus on sexual assault has spurred reporting, but also created ‘training fatigue’**

30 April - A decade into the Pentagon’s efforts to curb sexual assault in the ranks, officials say they’re having an effect — and if anything, are oversaturating troops with certain prevention messages. It’s time to develop better, more tailored training, leaders of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office said at the release of their annual report. In 2017, 6,769 servicemembers reported being the victim of a sexual assault. ... That marks an increase in reports of nearly 10 percent over the previous year. ... The 2016 report estimated that sexual assault in the ranks had dropped by more than half since they started looking at it in 2006. But after a decade of working on this, SAPRO leaders said it’s time to upgrade and update some of their efforts. While conducting more than 50 focus groups with junior
and senior enlisted members and officers, SAPRO heard that there was some “training fatigue.” Defense One

Report to Army finds blast from some weapons may put shooter's brain at risk

30 April - Military personnel may be endangering their own brains when they operate certain shoulder-fired weapons, according to an Army-commissioned report released Monday. The report, from the Center for a New American Security, says these bazooka-like weapons pose a hazard because they are powered by an explosion just inches from the operator's head. ... The report looks at a range of injuries caused by blast waves — pulses of high pressure air that emanate from an explosion and travel faster than the speed of sound. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, military officials recognized that the blast wave from a roadside bomb could damage a person's brain without leaving any visible sign of injury. ... Since then, there's been growing evidence that blasts from weapons like the Carl Gustav recoilless rifle and the AT4 anti-tank weapon can also affect the brain. ... Studies show that some service members who fire these weapons repeatedly have short-term problems with memory and thinking. What's not clear is whether those temporary changes can lead to permanent deficits. NPR

Update: Heat illness, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2017

April 2018 - In 2017, there were 464 incident diagnoses of heat stroke and 1,699 incident diagnoses of heat exhaustion among active component service members. The overall crude incidence rates of heat stroke and heat exhaustion were 0.38 cases and 1.41 cases per 1,000 person-years, respectively. In 2017, subgroup-specific incidence rates of both heat stroke and heat exhaustion were highest among service members aged 19 years or younger, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Marine Corps and Army members, and those in combat-specific occupations. The rate of heat stroke was markedly higher among males than females. In contrast, the rate of heat exhaustion among females was similar to that among males. During 2013–2017, a total of 359 heat illnesses were documented among service members in Iraq and Afghanistan; 8.6% (n=31) were diagnosed as heat stroke. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

White House ignores executive order requiring count of civilian casualties in counterterrorism strikes

1 May -The Trump administration has chosen to ignore an executive order that requires the White House to issue an annual report on the number of civilians and enemy fighters killed
by American counterterrorism strikes. The mandate for the report, which was due May 1, was established by former president Barack Obama in 2016 as part of a broader effort to lift the veil of secrecy surrounding drone operations in places such as Yemen, Somalia and Libya. ... “The executive order that requires the civilian casualty report is under review” and could be “modified” or “rescinded,” a White House spokesman said. The Washington Post

GLOBAL

Antiviral treatment for smallpox gets green light from FDA panel

2 May - SIGA Technologies, the maker of TPOXX, a small-molecule antiviral treatment for smallpox, announced today that an advisory panel for the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) unanimously concluded that the drug's benefits outweigh its risks. The FDA's Antimicrobial Drugs Advisory Committee voted 17-0 in favor of oral TPOXX. The vote precedes a probable favorable review for TPOXX's pending New Drug Application (NDA). ... SIGA developed the treatment with funding from the US government's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA). According to SIGA, BARDA has acquired 2 million courses of oral TPOXX, which have been delivered to the Strategic National Stockpile. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

Bat genome study suggests natural immunity to Marburg virus

27 April - A genetic analysis of samples of Egyptian fruit bats from a colony linked to a human Marburg virus death in Uganda yielded new clues about how their immune systems differ from primates and other species and how they harbor the viruses. A team based at the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) reported their findings yesterday in the journal Cell. [T]he team identified an expanded and diversified family of natural killer (NK) cell receptors, MHC class 1 genes, and type 1 interferons that dramatically differ from those in mammals, including mice and monkeys. Researchers suspect that the genetic function and differences lead to a higher threshold of activation of part of the bat immune system. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

Bloomberg era's emphasis on 'health in all policies' improved New Yorkers' heart health

2 May - From 2002 to 2013, New York City implemented a series of policies prioritizing the public's health in areas beyond traditional healthcare policies and illustrated the potential to reduce cardiovascular disease risk. This strategy is known as employing a 'health in all
policies' approach. Researchers catalogued health-relevant legislation in New York City from 1998 to 2017 and found that 7.4 percent of the 3,745 pieces of legislation introduced during the Bloomberg Administration had the potential to impact New Yorkers’ cardiovascular health. ScienceDaily

gap in air quality between rich and poorer countries increases

2 May - The gap in air quality between rich and poorer countries is increasing steadily, a new report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) has found. Air quality in more affluent states is slowly getting better, while the air in poorer countries is still getting worse, the study, which was released on Wednesday, said. ... In total, 90 percent of people around the world are breathing polluted air, which kills about seven million annually, the WHO estimated. ... The vast majority of the deaths each year - more than 90 percent - occurred in low-income countries in Asia and Africa. ... A big issue in these regions is the lack of access to clean cooking fuels and technologies in their homes, which leads to air pollution inside of homes. Al Jazeera

Google Street View images could help us address a public health crisis

2 May - ... According to a new study, [Google Street View] could be a great resource for improving public health. Researchers analyzed thousands of GSV images to determine whether the service could provide accurate data about a population’s transportation habits, according to a study published Wednesday in the journal PLOS ONE. They assert this data could help public health officials predict whether new transportation policies could make people healthier. ... Finding ways to encourage “active transport,” such as walking and cycling, is one way health officials can help increase a population’s activity level and potentially avoid some of those deaths. Before public health officials can craft such policies, though, they need accurate data on existing travel patterns. This study is necessary, the researchers note, because data like this is impractical to gather, done only once every 10 years, and less detailed than what’s possible from GSV. As James Woodcock, MRC Epidemiology Unit and the paper’s senior author, said in a press release, these images are “freely available” and collected “in a more consistent way than many traditional surveys.” Futurism

Ovarian cancer diagnoses 'will rise 55% in the next 20 years'

30 April - Ovarian cancer diagnoses are set to rise worldwide by nearly 55% in the next two decades, according to a global coalition that says more must be done to improve the poor
outcomes. Global survival rates range between 30% and 50%, says the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition. ... Ovarian cancer has the lowest survival rate of all the female cancers. ... More women are being diagnosed with ovarian cancer around the world, mainly because they are living longer – the disease mostly affects women over 50 who are post-menopausal. ... Rapid population growth is increasing the numbers of women of an age to get ovarian cancer. A third factor is the shift from rural into urban areas, which has been identified as an influence but is as yet unexplained. The Guardian

Scientists build 'synthetic embryos'

3 May - Dutch scientists have built "synthetic" embryos in their laboratory using mouse cells other than sperm and eggs. The stem cell breakthrough, described in Nature journal, is not for cloning people or animals, but about understanding why many pregnancies fail at an early stage - implantation. The embryos, made in a dish, attached to the womb lining of live female mice and grew for a few days. BBC News

INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 16:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity continued to be minimal for the majority of states. However, a pocket of low to high activity was seen in four mid-western states (Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana).
- EUCOM: Influenza activity in EUCOM decreased to minimal for all countries.
- PACOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in PACOM, except for the Republic of Korea, which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in CENTCOM locations with available data.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in Honduras for week 16.

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 21 April 2018 (week 16):

Influenza continues to be present, although activity was minimal across each region. In week 16, 6% (74) of specimens received were positive. Of these positive specimens, 51% were positive for influenza B, 32% for influenza A, 12% for RSV, 3% for adenovirus, and 1% were positive for parainfluenza. 11 influenza-associated hospitalizations were reported to DRSi (2
AD and 9 non-AD); only one case reported had an onset of symptoms in week 16. This influenza season had more than double the number of hospitalizations reported in DRSi as compared to last season. This is the final influenza report for the current season. APHC

Are we prepared for a killer flu epidemic?

27 April - ... "If a virus like the 1918 flu struck again, we wouldn’t be able to create a vaccine fast enough to make a big difference," says Sarah Gilbert, a virologist at Oxford University, who has been working on a universal flu vaccine for years. "It takes six months to manufacture the first doses of a vaccine for a new strain — and that's just the first doses. It will take longer to get the first million or 10 million doses," Gilbert says. By then the virus will have spread across six continents. "It will pretty much be across the world within a month," Gilbert exclaims. Even with antiviral drugs available and modern hygiene, computer models suggest the return of a 1918-flu strain could kill more than 100 million people worldwide. ... Now Bill Gates wants to help get us ready. "Today we are launching a $12 million Grand Challenge, in partnership with the Page family, to accelerate the development of a universal flu vaccine," Gates announced Friday at a scientific meeting in Boston. ... "Fundamentally, we are looking for unconventional approaches that ... develop universal influenza vaccines that are ready to start clinical trials by 2021," the foundation said in a statement. 

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

During week 16 (April 15-21, 2018), influenza activity decreased in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** Overall, influenza A(H3) viruses have predominated this season. Since early March, influenza B viruses have been more frequently reported than influenza A viruses. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories decreased.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.
- **Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths:** Four influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.

ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 16/2018 (16 - 22 April 2018)

- Influenza activity was at inter-season levels in all but one reporting country.
- While low in number, 12% of the individuals sampled from primary healthcare settings tested positive for influenza viruses (compared to 23% in the previous week).
Both influenza virus types A and B were co-circulating with the majority being type A. European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

Meta-analysis finds no protection drop-off with consecutive flu vaccination

2 May - A new meta-analysis of 42 flu studies found that vaccination over two consecutive seasons didn’t reduce flu vaccine effectiveness (VE) compared with people vaccinated during the current season, but the researchers included the caveat that the overall quality of evidence was low, due to inconsistency and imprecision among the studies. ... Subgroup analysis also supported the findings, but a dose-response analysis did show a reduced effectiveness in those who had three or more consecutive vaccinations.

CIDRAP Flu Scan (first item)

New review finds flu infects 1 in 5 unvaccinated kids, 1 in 10 adults

1 May - An updated analysis of the seasonal flu attack rate in unvaccinated people found that the virus infects 1 in 5 children each year and 1 in 10 adults, with symptomatic illness seen in about half of the infections. ... The investigators noted that there’s a lot of uncertainty and lack of data to guide estimates on the annual flu attack rate, which makes it difficult to plan vaccination programs and gauge the impact of future interventions. For their new analysis, they looked at 32 randomized, controlled vaccine trials containing 13,329 participants that reported on lab-confirmed flu in the placebo groups. ... Overall, rates of symptomatic infection were highest in children (12.7%), followed by the elderly (7.2%) and all adults (4.4%). CIDRAP Flu Scan (first item)

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

26 April - Febrile respiratory illness cases:
- Military Recruits - 25 positive of 43 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 30 positive of 74 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 4 positive of 28 tested. Naval Health Research Center

USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global Respiratory Pathogen Surveillance Program

During 8 - 21 April 2018 (Surveillance Weeks 15 & 16), a total of 267 specimens were collected and received from 49 locations. Results were finalized for 252 specimens from 49
WHO: Influenza Update

30 April - Influenza activity returned to inter-seasonal levels in most of the countries in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere except for Eastern Europe. In the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity remained below the seasonal thresholds. Worldwide, seasonal influenza subtypes A and B accounted for approximately the same proportion of influenza detections. National Influenza Centres (NICs) and other national influenza laboratories from 113 countries, areas or territories reported data to FluNet for the time period from 02 April 2018 to 15 April 2018 (data as of 2018-04-27 03:39:08 UTC). The WHO GISRS laboratories tested more than 137,071 specimens during that time period of which 21,639 were positive for influenza viruses. Among positive viruses 12,034 (55.6%) were typed as influenza A and 9,605 (44.4%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 3,077 (58.2%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 2,211 (41.8%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 917 (88.7%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 117 (11.3%) to the B-Victoria lineage. WHO

CDC reports one death from *E. coli* outbreak linked to romaine lettuce

2 May - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Wednesday one person from California died related to an *E. coli* outbreak linked to romaine lettuce, providing an update on the multi-state outbreak of the disease. Twenty-three more people fell ill since the last update on April 27, bringing the total to 121 people from 25 states, the CDC said. Three more states - Kentucky, Massachusetts and Utah - have reported cases, the CDC said in an email. Fifty-two people out of 102 with available information (or 51 percent) have been hospitalized, including 14 patients who developed hemolytic uremic syndrome, a type of kidney failure. Reuters

Nearly 36,000 pounds of ground beef recalled due to hard plastic in meat

3 May - More than 30,000 pounds of ground beef were recalled Wednesday after a customer reported finding blue plastic pieces in the meat. JBS USA, Inc., a food processing company based in Lenoir, N.C., announced it was recalling about 35,464 pounds of its
ground beef because it could possibly contain extraneous materials, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service announced. The recalled meat was produced on March 22. Fox News

No, your dog can’t get autism from a vaccine

27 April - The anti-vaccine movement has come for the pets. A spreading fear of pet vaccines’ side effects has prompted the British Veterinary Association to issue a startling statement this week: Dogs cannot develop autism. The implicit message was that dog owners should keep vaccinating their pets against diseases like distemper and canine hepatitis because any concerns that the animals would develop autism after the injections were unfounded. The warning has a long tail. It grew out of an anti-vaccine theory that rippled across the United States and Europe as networks known as “anti-vaxxers” claimed that childhood vaccinations could cause autism. The New York Times

Raw oysters from BC tied to norovirus outbreaks in Canada, U.S.

1 May - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) yesterday said federal and state health authorities, along with Canadian public health officials, are investigating multistate and multi-province norovirus outbreaks linked to raw oysters from British Columbia. So far, there’s no word on how many illnesses and states are involved in the US part of the outbreak, but the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) said today that about 100 people have reported getting sick after eating raw oysters from British Columbia, and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) said on Apr 27 that 172 cases so far have been reported in three provinces—British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. CIDRAP News

WELLNESS

Embedded mental health providers making a difference for troops, officials say

27 April - Embedding mental health professionals within military units is producing some good results as troops have easier access to the help they need, the services’ surgeons general told lawmakers. The Army has seen a decrease of 41 percent in the inpatient admission rate for acute behavioral health issues “because we’ve been able to handle it at the local level, and intervene earlier” before crises happen, said Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Nadja West, testifying Thursday before the Senate Appropriations Committee’s defense panel. The Army has been assigning behavioral health providers to operational units, and more soldiers are receiving care in an outpatient setting, instead of having to go
to a hospital. That’s contributed to more visits to behavioral health, West said. Overall use of behavioral health care increased from about 900,000 visits in fiscal 2007 to more than 2.25 million in fiscal 2017, she said. Military Times

Federal government sends warning to vaping companies

2 May - The Food and Drug Administration and Federal Trade Commission on Tuesday sent warning letters to 13 manufacturers, distributors and retailers of e-cigarette liquids. In a phone briefing for reporters, FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said the companies are endangering kids by marketing the products to resemble juice boxes, cookies or candy. ... E-liquids are used in electronic cigarettes, and they often use nicotine which can cause illness — even death — if ingested by a small child. Products targeted have names like Smurf Sauce and V’Nilla Cookies & Milk. "These are being deliberately designed in ways that they can be just mistakenly confused by a child," Gottlieb said in the briefing. The agencies cited recent national data of thousands of nicotine exposures in kids younger than 6, who accidentally ingested the vaping liquid. NPR

Five healthy habits to live by

30 April - Maintaining five healthy habits — eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, keeping a healthy body weight, not drinking too much alcohol, and not smoking — during adulthood may add more than a decade to life expectancy. ... For study participants who didn’t adopt any of the low-risk habits, the researchers estimated that life expectancy at age 50 was 29 years for women and 25.5 years for men. But for those who adopted all five, life expectancy at age 50 was projected to be 43.1 years for women and 37.6 years for men. In other words, women who maintained all five healthy habits gained, on average, 14 years of life, and men who did so gained 12 years, compared with those who didn’t maintain healthy habits. Harvard Gazette

Talk therapy may help soldiers combat insomnia

27 April - Talk therapy for insomnia is effective at reducing insomnia, as well as mental fatigue, among military personnel, according to a new study. For the new analysis ... researchers recruited 151 active-duty U.S. Army personnel stationed at Fort Hood, Texas who had chronic insomnia and randomly assigned half of them to receive six weekly 60-minute sessions of a treatment cognitive behavior therapy for insomnia (CBTi). All the soldiers had served at least one military deployment in or around Iraq or Afghanistan. The average age was about 32, and more than 80 percent were male. CBTi is a short-term, goal oriented type of psychotherapy that tries to change destructive thinking and behavior. ... Control group volunteers were contacted briefly every other week for six weeks. About 11
weeks after the start of the study, participants receiving CBTi were sleeping longer and waking less during the night than control subjects. CBTi also helped military personnel reduce their mental fatigue and improve their scores on assessments of their mental health.

Reuters

USAFRICOM

Africa: Africa analysis finds high levels of antibiotic-resistant *H pylori*

30 April - A study designed to provide a clearer picture of the burden of *Helicobacter pylori* antibiotic resistance, which is increasing worldwide, found that levels in Africa are high, an international team of researchers reported. ... They noted that the prevalence of *H pylori* infection, which can cause peptic ulcers and gastric cancer, varies by geographic region and quantity of antibiotics used, with seropositive levels much higher in developing countries than in their developed counterparts. In their meta-analysis, the team looked at 26 studies on *H pylori* resistance from 14 African countries that were published from 1986 to 2017. ... Pooled proportion of *H pylori* resistance was 17.4% for quinolones, 29.2% for clarithromycin, 48.7% for tetracycline, 75.8% for metronidazole, and 72.6% for amoxicillin.

CIDRAP Stewardship/Resistance Scan (third item)

East Africa: South Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya strengthen implementation of cross-border disease surveillance and outbreak response in East Africa

27 April - The Republic of South Sudan hosted a joint cross-border multi-sectoral disease surveillance meeting in Nimule, South Sudan from 24-26 April, 2018. Experts drawn from human, animal, environmental health and immigration sectors of South Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya deliberated on mechanisms to strengthen implementation of cross border disease surveillance and outbreak response in the region. ... The East African region has been threatened by numerous emerging and re-emerging disease outbreaks of international concern with potential to spread across borders including polio, yellow fever, Ebola Virus disease, Marburg Viral fever, Crimean Congo hemorrhagic fever, Hepatitis E virus, cholera, measles, meningitis, Rift valley fever, and strange outbreaks of unknown origin.

WHO

Réunion: WHO says unprecedented dengue outbreak hits La Reunion

2 May - The French overseas territory of La Reunion is experiencing an unprecedented outbreak of dengue fever which could be spread by tourists to other countries, the World
Health Organization said on Wednesday. Dengue is a mosquito-borne virus that may be thriving because of a lack of immunity among the population of the Indian Ocean island, the WHO said, adding the virus may also have spread unnoticed in recent years as asymptomatic cases may have contributed to the transmission cycle. This year there have been 1,816 dengue cases confirmed, as of April 23. All of them were “autochthonous” - local rather than imported by tourists and travelers. In the week to April 23, there were 428 probable and confirmed cases reported, compared to fewer than 100 in all of 2017. Reuters

USCENTCOM

Saudi Arabia: Saudi MOH records two new deaths from MERS

30 April - The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health (MOH) confirmed two new deaths from MERS-CoV, one of which may be a previously unreported case. ... The fatalities bring Saudi Arabia’s MERS totals since 2012 to 1,836, including 744 deaths. One person is still being treated for MERS-CoV infection. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

Syria: Experts want to exhume alleged Syria chemical attack victims for testing

3 May - Experts from the world’s chemical weapons watchdog hope to exhume the bodies of victims of an alleged chemical attack in Syria in order to take samples, the body’s chief has said. At least 48 people died in the suspected chemical attack in Douma, the last rebel-held town in Eastern Ghouta, on April 7. A fact-finding team from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons finally collected samples from the site in Douma on April 21, after waiting days for access. The delay raised concerns that any chemicals potentially used could have degraded before inspectors reached the site or that evidence could have been manipulated. The OPCW is now seeking samples from the remains of those killed in the attack, Director-General Ahmet Uzumcu told the Financial Times. CNN

USEUCOM

Europe: Six cases of hospital-acquired malaria in Europe demonstrate risk

30 April - Since January of 2016, four European Union countries reported six cases of hospital-acquired malaria. ... Though the number of hospital-acquired cases is not
necessarily alarming, [European Centre for Disease Prevention] officials said the concomitant infections in Italy (2 cases), Spain (2), Greece (1) and Germany (1) are unusual. The route of transmission in these cases is not known, but hospital-acquired malaria has been associated with procedures related to blood-borne transmission, including injections or infusions. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)

**Finland: Drug overdose leading cause of death among men under 40 in Finland**

30 April - According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction EMCDDA, there were 194 cases of death due to drug overdose in 2016 – an increase of 28 cases on the previous year. The agency has based its findings on data provided by Statistics Finland. The agency found that men are over-represented in the proportion of deaths caused by drug overdose, which is one of the leading causes of death among men under the age of forty in Finland. In fact, fatal drug overdose cases rank alongside suicide, cancer and accidents as one of the most common causes of death in this age group. The agency reported that more than two-thirds of drug overdose fatalities – some 77 percent – involve men.

**Israel/Gaza Strip: Palestinians face explosive bullets, dangerous gas bombs**

2 May – ... Medics on the ground say Israeli forces are shooting at demonstrators with a new type of round - never seen before - known as the “butterfly bullet”, which explodes upon impact, pulverizing tissue, arteries and bone, while causing severe internal injuries. Palestinians have also noted an unknown toxic gas launched at demonstrators, which provokes severe convulsions. ... Palestinians have also noted an unknown toxic gas launched at demonstrators, which provokes severe convulsions. The yellow-green gas has caused many who were exposed to it to convulse, their legs and bodies thrashing violently as they lay on the ground. ... "It’s much more dangerous than tear gas, and its symptoms are more severe," explained Dr Ashraf Joma’a, a chemistry specialist from Gaza, noting it is difficult to find an appropriate treatment.

**United Kingdom: Health bosses criticise visa rules for doctors**

27 April - Immigration rules are hampering the ability of the NHS to recruit doctors, health leaders are warning. The number of skilled non-EU workers granted UK visas is capped - with the Home Office arguing the restriction is in "the national interest". But NHS bosses say increasing numbers of doctors are being refused permission, worsening rota gaps and the waits patients face for treatment. It comes amid a row after visas for 100 Indian doctors
were refused. The doctors had been recruited as part of a long-running scheme in the North West which supplies junior doctors to more than 30 NHS trusts. Bosses at the trusts have written to Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt and Home Secretary Amber Rudd asking them to urgently look into the problem. BBC News

United Kingdom: Warning issued in London after toxic caterpillar outbreak

29 April - Residents in London are being told to beware the white-haired caterpillars that can cause rashes, vomiting and asthma attacks. The British Forestry Commission says caterpillars that become oak processionary moths have been spotted in and around the English capital since mid-April. The caterpillars are covered in thousands of hairs containing the protein thaumetopoein, which can cause skin rashes, sore throats, breathing difficulties and eye problems. People are being warned not to touch the creatures, which are most often found in oak trees — and to keep pets away from them, too. Officials are treating oak trees with pesticide to try and eliminate the moths, which were accidentally introduced to Britain in 2005 on plants imported from continental Europe. Business Insider

U.S.: Analysis links U.S. government global health R&D funding to jobs, economic benefits across states

1 May - The Trump Administration's proposal to slash funding to fight global health threats like malaria, Ebola, and HIV/AIDS could cost states thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in economic investment and put the health of residents at risk, according to a new state-by-state analysis released today on Capitol Hill by the Global Health Technologies Coalition (GHTC). This first-of-its-kind analysis quantifies how federal funding to create vaccines and treatments to combat deadly global diseases also benefits American states. ... U.S. investments in global health research and development (R&D) from 2007 to 2015 generated considerable economic benefits for individual states--creating jobs and injecting millions of dollars into local economies. ... The analysis also underscores the dangers of ignoring neglected diseases in an increasingly interconnected world by enumerating how these diseases--assumed by many to only afflict the world's poorest--also affect individuals across every state. EurekAlert
U.S.: Antibiotic-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* infections in children across the US: After 2008, a downward trend reported

3 May - In the first national study of the prevalence of antibiotic-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* infections in children across the US, researchers from Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics, & Policy (CDDEP) in Washington, DC and Rush University in Chicago, IL examined national and regional trends of antibiotic resistance in clinical specimens over a 13-year period. While there was an overall increase between 1999 and 2012 in the proportion of isolates of *A. baumannii* that were resistant to cephalosporin and carbapenem, the authors noted a slight decline after a peak in 2008. The decrease may be attributable to a combination of antibiotic stewardship guidelines released in 2007 and infection control guidance specifically designed to combat multi-drug resistant *A. baumannii* in healthcare settings. Outbreak News Today

U.S.: Coal ash raising concerns over health risks in Puerto Rico

28 April - Residents of Guayama, home to Puerto Rico's only coal-burning power plant for 15 years, have been diagnosed with cancer, heart and respiratory diseases that they fear are related to coal ash exposure. Ivette Feliciano reports on the concerns of Puerto Ricans who say the situation grew worse after Hurricane Maria—and the national implications as President Donald Trump's administration rolls back regulations on the disposal of coal ash. PBS News Hour

U.S.: Dozens develop rare eye cancer in a case that's baffling doctors

1 May - Several Auburn University graduates and more than a dozen North Carolina residents have all developed a rare form of eye cancer in a case that has left doctors baffled. Ocular melanoma is diagnosed to about 2,500 people a year but statistics show two towns – Auburn, Ala., and Huntersville, N.C. – have a high number of patients living with the cancer, Healthline reported earlier this month. ... Auburn, the home to one of the state's largest universities, has about 63,000 people living in the city. Thirty-six Auburn graduates have been diagnosed with the rare cancer, including a group of friends who developed it years apart. In Huntersville, 18 people were diagnosed with the cancer. ... Researchers were studying the patients to see if there is any link between the patients and the cancer, [Dr. Marlana] Orloff told CBS News. Fox News
U.S.: Fifth Annual Stand-Down for Fall Safety - Building momentum for the next five years

30 April - Workers across the nation are participating in the fifth National Safety Stand-Down to Prevent Falls in Construction, during the week of May 7-11. With falls on construction sites the leading cause of death in the industry, employers are encouraged to stop all work at some point during this week and speak directly to their workers about fall hazards through talks, demonstrations and training to reinforce the importance of proper fall prevention. NIOSH

U.S.: NIOSH, OSHA release guidance on ototoxicity

1 May - A document posted by NIOSH on March 15, 2018, and credited both to NIOSH and OSHA offers guidance for preventing hearing loss that is caused by ototoxic chemicals and noise exposure. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication Number 2018-124, a Safety and Health Information Bulletin, lists five examples of substance classes of ototoxic chemicals: pharmaceuticals, solvents, asphyxiants, nitriles, metals and compounds. Mercury compounds and lead are among the chemicals listed in the metals and compounds class. The asphyxiants listed include carbon monoxide, tobacco smoke, and hydrogen cyanide and its salts. “There is growing concern among occupational health and safety professionals that ototoxicant-induced hearing loss may go unrecognized since the measure for hearing loss does not indicate the cause,” the five-page document states.

U.S.: U.S. ‘a lot more fragile than we realize’ on biothreats, experts warn

27 April - The nation is critically underprepared to confront transnational biological threats ranging from DIY bioterror agents to natural pathogens that outpace current pharmaceuticals and overwhelm medical facilities. … [T]he country is "woefully unprepared for these biological threats" in an increasingly interdependent world. "Events halfway around the world have rapid effects," [James Lawler] said, and the nation suffers from a "lack of threat awareness and poor situational awareness as it comes to biological threats." Problems include "excruciatingly slow and moribund" programs that rely too much on "backwards engineering" of the last big threat along with insufficient staffing and not enough human intelligence on biological programs, as well as a "lack of situational awareness in day-to-day health activities." Lawler stressed that there are "still significant problems connecting the clinical world with the public health world," while the ability "to be able to understand those events in real time is critical to being able to defend ourselves in rapidly evolving events." Homeland Security Today

1 May - A total of 642,602 cases of 16 diseases caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites transmitted through the bites of mosquitoes, ticks, or fleas were reported to CDC during 2004–2016. ... Tickborne diseases more than doubled in 13 years and were 77% of all vectorborne disease reports. Lyme disease accounted for 82% of all tickborne cases. ... Tickborne disease cases predominated in the eastern continental United States and areas along the Pacific coast. Mosquitoborne dengue, chikungunya, and Zika viruses were almost exclusively transmitted in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, where they were periodically epidemic. West Nile virus, also occasionally epidemic, was widely distributed in the continental United States, where it is the major mosquitoborne disease. During 2004–2016, nine vectorborne human diseases were reported for the first time from the United States and U.S. territories. The discovery or introduction of novel vectorborne agents will be a continuing threat. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

USPACOM

India: At least 91 dead after powerful rain and dust storms lash parts of India

3 May - At least 91 people have died and another 160 injured after powerful rain and dust storms lashed parts of northern and western India on Wednesday night. Disaster relief official Sanjay Kumar said the worst damage occurred in the northern city of Agra in Uttar Pradesh state — home to the famous Taj Mahal monument — where 43 people including children were killed. Many of them died when their homes collapsed and in lightning strikes as wind speeds reached up to 80 mph. At least 27 people died and another 100 were injured in the western state of Rajasthan, the Press Trust of India news agency reported. The powerful winds and dust uprooted hundreds of trees. USA Today

Western Pacific Region: Progress toward measles elimination, 2013–2017

4 May - Most countries in the World Health Organization Western Pacific Region (WPR) have made substantial progress toward measles elimination. During 2013–2016, a resurgence of measles occurred in WPR, with large-scale outbreaks in Mongolia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, and increased endemic transmission in China; in 2014, annual incidence increased to 68.9 cases per million. However, with control of the outbreaks, in 2017, incidence decreased to a new historic low (5.2 per million). Achieving high reported vaccination coverage is not sufficient for achieving regional measles elimination. Efforts by
WPR countries are needed to establish high population immunity, build strong immunization systems, maintain high-quality surveillance, and improve outbreak preparedness and response. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

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**US SOUTHCOM**

Brazil: Brazil confirms 61 new yellow fever cases, 22 deaths

27 April - The Brazilian Ministry of Health (MOH) updated yellow fever counts for the country, noting 61 newly confirmed cases including 22 more deaths from the virus. Between Jul 1, 2017 and Apr 24, 2018 the MOH has confirmed 1,218 cases of yellow fever and 364 deaths. During the same period in 2016-2017, 779 human cases and 262 deaths were registered, according to the MOH. The majority of new cases occurred in Rio de Janeiro (36), Minas Gerais (14), and Sao Paulo (11). Also last week, officials confirmed yellow fever cases in non-human primates in the same three states. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

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Venezuela: Malaria cases increase 10x since 2010

29 April - Venezuela has the highest percentage increase of malaria cases in the world, according to the latest data from the World Health Organization. In fact, the number of cases in the country have increased by a factor of 10 since 2010. ... In 2010, the country had recorded 45,000 cases of malaria. By 2016, the rate was already 240,613. However, the data from Caracas was questioned and other estimates put it at 300,000 cases. Last year, the estimated case count is 406,000. With the economic collapse in the country, the malaria outbreak is concerning its neighbors like Brazil and Colombia as Venezuelan refugees and immigrants pour out of their country. Outbreak News Today

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