NOTE:
If you are viewing the Army Public Health Weekly Update using Internet Explorer on a government computer with Windows 10, the external hyperlinks will be disabled per the Security Technical Implementation Guide (V-64927).

As a workaround, opening the Update using Chrome will enable the links.

We're sorry for the inconvenience.

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U.S. MILITARY

126,000 service members in crosshairs for separation as DoD’s ‘deploy or get out’ policy takes effect

2 October - The Pentagon’s hard line on troop readiness took effect Monday, and 126,000 service members now find themselves on a path to separation if they do not become deployable in the next 12 months. “Deploy or get out” was an early policy priority of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to improve the overall readiness of U.S. military forces. ...

“Excluding trainees, approximately 6 percent (126,000) of the total force — active duty, National Guard and Reserve — were non-deployable as of Aug. 31, 2018,” DoD said in a statement to Military Times. ... The reasons vary, but they are predominantly medical.” Of that 126,000 total, 66,000 are non-deployable due to illness or injury, DoD said. Of that 126,000 total, 24,000 are considered permanently non-deployable and were pending a disability evaluation that could lead to the service member’s transition out of the military, DoD said. Military Times

A staggering number of troops are fat and tired, report says

3 October - A 2018 RAND report on health promotion and disease prevention has painted a grim picture of the military’s physical fitness and sleep standards. The study, featuring roughly 18,000 randomly selected participants across each of the service branches, showed that almost 66 percent of service members are considered to be either overweight or obese, based on the military’s use of body mass index as a measuring standard. ... Broken down by service, the 2018 report lists the Army as the branch accounting for the highest percentage of overweight troops, with 69.4 percent of soldiers falling under this category. ... Another glaring area of concern highlighted in the study was the inability of service members to get adequate sleep. Nearly 9 percent of military personnel reported taking sleeping medications either “daily” or “almost daily.” The Army reported the highest rate of sleep concerns, with 10.6 percent of soldiers routinely consuming sleeping aids. ... In terms of problematic
Vector-borne Disease Report

As of 26 September 2018, 143 confirmed, probable, and suspect cases of vector-borne diseases have been diagnosed and reported in the Disease Reporting System internet (DRSI). Approximately 63% of the cases were among Active Duty Service Members.

The most frequently reported vector-borne diseases to date this year are Lyme disease and malaria, with 78 and 40 cases reported, respectively. These two diseases account for 83% of the cases reported in DRSI thus far in 2018.

Additionally, 182 West Nile Virus (WNV)-positive mosquito pools have been identified from 16 different locations in 10 states; no human cases of WNV have been reported in DRSI.

Marines to ramp up tests on hearing protection troops might actually wear

1 October - Situational awareness is one of the most important things on the battlefield, but the devices meant to protect Marines' hearing can sometimes dull their senses, leaving some to ditch the protective gear altogether. The Marine Corps wants to fix that, and will be ramping up tests this year for new headsets officials hope let Marines them hear what's going on around them while still protecting their hearing. ... Marine officials met with 16 companies last week, many of which were presenting ideas for better hearing protection, Pierce said. In additional to improving situational awareness, he said they hope to eventually field headsets that are flexible and work with a wide range of radios. Marines have been testing some of the new headsets in Ohio and Norway in order to assess how they perform in different climates. Military.com

NIH, DOD to develop Limb Loss and Preservation Registry

1 October - A new database supported by the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense aims to establish the number of people in the United States living with limb loss and to provide insight on their challenges and needs. The Limb Loss and Preservation Registry, expected to be operational in 2020 will be the first national registry of people who have lost limbs and promises to collect data that will improve prevention, treatment and rehabilitation efforts for this population. NIH

No prior mental health diagnosis for many soldiers attempting suicide

3 October - While mental health conditions are a strong predictor of who is likely to try to take their own life, that doesn’t account for a sizeable percentage of soldiers at risk of suicide, according to a new study. In fact, recent research ... found 36% of soldiers who attempted suicide had no prior mental health diagnosis. “Among soldiers, as in the general population, mental health disorders are consistent predictors of suicide attempt and death. However, only 60% of enlisted soldiers with a documented suicide attempt and less than 50% of soldiers who died by suicide actually received a prior mental health diagnosis,” the authors said. Still, soldiers without a mental health diagnosis share risk factors for suicide with soldiers who do have a diagnosis. ... “After a family violence event or a legal event or injury, there is increased risk. Also, those at risk are frequent users of outpatient health care,” [Robert J.] Ursano [said.] U.S. Medicine
Primary Care Providers’ Role in Supporting Children, Families, and Professional Self-Care Following Hurricanes and Other Disasters

Primary care providers are essential for promoting children’s mental health and well-being throughout the recovery process following hurricanes. Disasters, such as Hurricane Florence, can cause short and long-term effects on the psychological functioning, emotional adjustment, health, and developmental trajectory of children. Additionally, disasters often impact healthcare providers to at least the same degree they impact others in the community, and being with suffering children and families can be distressing for providers.

Update: Routine screening for antibodies to human immunodeficiency virus, civilian applicants for U.S. Military Service and U.S. Armed Forces, Active and Reserve Components, January 2013–June 2018

September 2018 - This report provides an update through June 2018 of the results of routine screening for antibodies to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) among civilian applicants for military service and among members of the active and reserve components of the U.S. Armed Forces. During the surveillance period, full-year seroprevalences among applicants for service peaked in 2015 (0.34 per 1,000 tested) and then decreased during the subsequent 2 years. ... Seroprevalences among Army active component service members, Navy active component members, Navy reservists, Marine Corps reservists, and Air National Guard members also peaked in 2015. Overall (1 January 2013 through 30 June 2018) seroprevalences were highest for Army reservists, Army National Guard members, Navy reservists, and Navy active component members. Across active and reserve components of all services, HIV antibody seroprevalences continued to be higher among males than females. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

global

Avalanche Safety 101: Technology to the rescue

3 October - Note to backcountry skiers: You can now carry an airbag with you as a protection against the ever-present danger of an avalanche. But these airbags aren’t just in the business of cushioning your encounter with a wall of ice, a ski country emergency physician told colleagues this week. They’re also designed to push your body toward the surface. You can also bring along a unique breathing device on your ski run, and this may be especially crucial to your survival in an avalanche. "We know it’s not trauma that kills most victims," said Scott E. McIntosh, MD, MPH, MACEP, of the University of Utah School of Medicine. "It’s actually asphyxia. It’s the number one killer." MedPage Today

every cell has a story to tell in brain injury

3 October - Traumatic head injury can have widespread effects in the brain, but now scientists can look in real time at how head injury affects thousands of individual cells and genes simultaneously in mice. This approach could lead to precise treatments for traumatic brain injury (TBI). ... [Researchers] used a novel method known as Drop-seq to closely look at individual brain cells in the hippocampus, a region involved in learning and memory, after TBI or in uninjured control animals. Drop-seq allows thousands of cells and genes to be analyzed simultaneously. ... "These tools provide us with unprecedented precision to
Heart disease common among firefighters who die of cardiac arrest

28 September - Most firefighters who die from cardiac arrest turn out to have narrowing of the heart arteries or structural damage in their hearts, a recent study suggests. ... [R]esearch to date hasn't offered a clear picture of why so many firefighters killed on the job die of cardiac arrest rather than from fire-related injuries. ... Research shows that firefighters are more likely to suffer a cardiac event after fire-fighting versus station duties. ... Researchers examined autopsy data from 627 male firefighters, ages 18 to 65, who died between 1999 and 2014, including 276 cardiac cases and 351 trauma cases. Surprisingly, less than one in five cardiac cases were heart attack deaths. ... Instead, 82 percent of those who died had evidence of coronary heart disease - narrowing of the heart arteries - or enlarged hearts.

"Nature is potentially the worst bioterrorist," says Anthony Fauci

26 September - Dr. Anthony Fauci says he's "cautiously optimistic" about the future of global health, which he says has the potential to be enhanced by the development of universal vaccines and improved preventative measures. As the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Fauci says that the greatest causes of global health crises stem from modern, man-made activity: ease of travel, population growth and human intrusion into the environment. ... The NIAID director also warns of harmful, man-made effects on the environment. He [says that] human encroachment on the environment is a proven catalyst for the epidemics and pandemics that are the biggest threat to life. ... Fauci expresses skepticism about the potential threat posed by man-made agents used for bioterrorism, suggesting naturally evolving pathogens are still our most likely and dangerous foe.

Report on bodily fluids shows Zika persistence in semen

27 September - A final report on the persistence of Zika virus in bodily fluids from people in Puerto Rico today ... highlighting results from the ZIKV Persistence (ZiPer) cohort study suggests that, for the vast majority of men, Zika RNA is cleared from semen within 4 months. The study was based on 295 people in Puerto Rico infected with Zika beginning in May 2016. Only patients with symptomatic Zika ... were included. Researchers collected samples of serum, urine, saliva, semen, and vaginal secretions weekly for the first month and at 2, 4, and 6 months after diagnosis.
Study finds that a lifestyle intervention may mitigate PFAS-related weight gain

25 September - A new study finds that perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs) are associated with increases in weight, but exercise and diet may reduce the obesogenic effects of these environmental contaminants. ... Study participants who were randomized to a lifestyle intervention group received training in diet, physical activity, and behavior modification. Participants randomized to placebo were given standard information about diet and exercise. The investigators found that among adults at high risk for diabetes, higher plasma PFAS concentrations were associated with a prospective and long-term increase in weight and hip girth among individuals randomized to the placebo group, but not for those randomized to the lifestyle intervention. The results indicate that lifestyle changes of exercise and diet can reduce the obesogenic effects of environmental exposures.

EurekAlert

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Study links hospital *Candida auris* outbreak to reusable thermometers

3 October - A large *Candida auris* outbreak at a hospital in England appears to be linked to reusable patient-monitoring equipment, a team of researchers reports today. ... The outbreak in the neurosciences intensive care unit (ICU) at Oxford University Hospitals involved 70 patients who were infected or colonized with *C auris*, a fungus that has become increasingly resistant to azoles, echinocandins, and polyenes. ... An epidemiologic investigation and case-control study ... found that the most compelling explanation for the prolonged outbreak was the persistence of the organism on reusable skin-surface axillary probes, a device placed in a patient’s armpit for continuous temperature monitoring.

CIDRAP News

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Tech breakthrough offers early warning system for heart attacks

4 October - A new method of analyzing images from CT scans can predict which patients are at risk of a heart attack years before it occurs, researchers say. The technology, developed by teams at Oxford University and institutions in Germany and the United States, uses algorithms to examine the fat surrounding coronary arteries as it shows up on computed tomography (CT) heart scans. That fat gets altered when an artery becomes inflamed, serving as an early warning system for what one of the researchers believes could be up 30 percent of heart attacks. “If you are able to identify inflammation in the arteries of the heart then you can say which arteries ... will cause heart attacks,” Oxford Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine, Charalambos Antoniades, told Reuters.

Reuters

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U.S. still outpaces other nations in infant, child mortality

1 October - Mortality rates for infants, children, and young adults have fallen in the U.S., Canada, England and Wales, but death rates in a new study were still higher for American youth than for young people in other countries. ... “The rates for major causes of death among infants, children and young adults generally declined over the study period; this is great news,” said senior author Meredith Shiels of the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. “Unfortunately, the U.S. still lags behind Canada and the United Kingdom in terms of overall mortality rates for children, and, within the U.S., death rates remain higher among American Indian/Alaska Natives and black children, compared to other racial/ethnic groups,” Shiels said by email. Overall, from 1999 to 2015, mortality rates for people under 25 years old declined 0.82 percent per year to 4.01 percent a year, researchers report in *JAMA Pediatrics*. Reuters

**INFLUENZA**

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

2017-2018 Influenza Season Week 38 ending September 22, 2018

Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) Mortality Surveillance: Based on National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) mortality surveillance data available on September 27, 2018, 5.5% of the deaths occurring during the week ending September 8, 2018 (week 36) were due to P&I. This percentage is below the epidemic threshold of 5.8% for week 36. CDC

China reports human H5N6 avian flu case in Guangdong province

1 October - Yesterday Hong Kong’s Centre for Health Protection (CHP) reported a human case of H5N6 avian flu in Guangdong province. A 22-old-man developed symptoms on Sep 25 and was hospitalized on Sep 26. He is in serious condition and told authorities he had contact with live poultry before falling ill. According to the CHP, this case raises the total human cases of H5N6 reported in China since 2014 to 21. Authorities said everyone should practice good hygiene around live poultry and in open-air markets to prevent the spread of the virus. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

Flu drug speeds relief from symptoms in at-risk patients: Roche

4 October - Influenza drug baloxavir marboxil significantly sped time to relief for patients highly vulnerable to serious complications, a late-stage clinical trial has shown, Swiss
drugmaker Roche said on Thursday. If approved, it would mark the first new way to treat influenza in nearly two decades, Roche added. The CAPSTONE-2 phase III trial showed the median time to improvement of symptoms versus placebo dropped to 73.2 hours from 102.3 hours for at-risk patients including people aged 65 or older and those with asthma, chronic lung disease, morbid obesity or heart disease. Reuters

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

27 September - Febrile respiratory illness cases:
- Military Recruits - 1 positive of 1 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance – 2 positive of 3 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 6 positive of 20 tested. Naval Health Research Center

WHO: Influenza Update

1 October - In the temperate zones of the southern hemisphere, influenza activity appeared to decrease in South America and Southern Africa. Influenza activity remained at low seasonal levels in Australia and New Zealand and at inter-seasonal levels in most of temperate zone of the northern hemisphere. Increased influenza detections were reported in some countries of Southern and South-East Asia. Worldwide, seasonal influenza subtype A viruses accounted for the majority of detections. WHO

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Campylobacter and Salmonella behind most outbreaks in Germany

3 October - Almost 400 foodborne outbreaks occurred in Germany last year, according to a report. Most outbreaks with high evidence were caused by raw milk. A total of 389 outbreaks involved at least 2,277 illnesses, 412 hospitalizations and four deaths. Salmonella was implicated in two deaths and Verotoxin-producing E. coli (VTEC) and Hepatitis A virus in one each. Almost three-quarters of the outbreaks were caused by Campylobacter spp. and Salmonella. The number of outbreaks is down slightly from 397 in 2016, while illnesses fell from 2,508 but hospitalizations rose from 256. The amount of associated deaths stayed the same. Food Safety News
Egg-related *Salmonella* outbreak sickens 24 more and reaches 7 states

3 October - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) yesterday reported 24 more illnesses in a *Salmonella* Enteritidis outbreak linked to eggs from Alabama-based Gravel Ridge Farms, and health officials have identified the outbreak strain in environmental and egg samples from the farm that produced the eggs. In its update, the CDC said the outbreak total has grown to 38 cases, including 10 patients who were hospitalized for their infections. No deaths have been reported. Five more states reported cases (Colorado, Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, and Montana), raising that total to seven. Illness-onset dates range from Jun 17 to Aug 16. *CIDRAP News Scan* (second item)

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*Listeria* illnesses spurs recall of ready-to-eat ham products; one person dead

4 October - Smithfield, NC-based Johnston County Hams Inc. initiated a recall on Wednesday of more than 89,000 pounds of ready-to-eat ham in relation to *Listeria monocytogenes* infections. Some of the recalled products have a shelf life through September of next year. “(The USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service) FSIS is concerned that some product may be frozen and in consumers’ freezers. Consumers who have purchased these products are urged not to consume them. These products should be thrown away or returned to the place of purchase,” according to the recall notice.

*Food Safety News*

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Mortality and health outcomes in North Carolina communities located in close proximity to hog concentrated animal feeding operations

September-October 2018 - Life expectancy in southeastern North Carolina communities located in an area with multiple concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) after adjusting for socioeconomic factors remains low. ... North Carolina communities located near hog CAFOs had higher all-cause and infant mortality, mortality due to anemia, kidney disease, tuberculosis, septicemia, and higher hospital admissions/ED visits of LBW infants. Although not establishing causality with exposures from hog CAFOs, our findings support the need for future studies to determine factors that influence these outcomes, as well as the need to improve screening and diagnostic strategies for these diseases in North Carolina communities adjacent to hog CAFOs. *North Carolina Medical Journal*

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WELLNESS

Diet rich in fried and processed foods linked to increased hypertension in black Americans

3 October - New findings suggest that diet is a major contributor for the increased risk of hypertension in black compared to white Americans. Researchers studied individuals over the age of 45 over a period of 10 years and looked to identify risk factors associated with the higher likelihood of developing high blood pressure in the study participants. "The majority of disparities we see in the health of black versus white Americans are cardiovascular in nature," said Dr. Howard, "and of these, all are tied to an increase in high blood pressure." For both men and women, a diet composed of high amounts of fried and processed foods and sweetened beverages was the greatest factor associated with why blacks are at a greater risk of developing high blood pressure compared to whites. For both men and women, other important factors included salt intake and education level. For women, additional factors contributing to the racial difference in high blood pressure included obesity and waist size. NIH

Gastric banding as effective as metformin in slowing progression of prediabetes, type 2 diabetes

3 October - People with prediabetes or new-onset type 2 diabetes who had gastric banding, a type of bariatric surgery for weight loss, had similar stabilization of their disease to those who took metformin alone, according to a study supported by the National Institutes of Health. After two years, people in the gastric banding group lost significantly more weight, an average of 23 pounds, compared to four pounds in the metformin group. The two treatment groups ended up with similar improvements in insulin sensitivity and relatively stable function of insulin-producing cells, with small improvements in blood glucose levels. NIH

More than 1 in 3 adults eat fast food on a given day, CDC survey finds

3 October - Americans can't get enough fast food, suggests a survey published Wednesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics shows between 2013 and 2016, more than 36 percent of adults - or more than 1 in 3 - consume fast food on a given day. Findings also showed fast food consumption decreased with age. Forty-five percent of adults ages 20 to 39 ate fast food, while only 24 percent of adults over 60 had fast food as a meal or snack. Men tend to eat more fast food than women, said the survey, and non-Hispanic black adults consumed more fast food (42 percent) compared to other races. A person's income also played a key role in
how often they ate fast food. People with higher incomes were more likely to consume fast food than those at lower incomes, the survey found. USA Today

More than two-thirds of employees are tired at work

2 October - According to a survey report released Monday by the National Safety Council, 69 percent of employees are tired on the job, which increases the risk of workplace injuries and incidents. The report focuses on results from high-risk industries where fatigue can have dire consequences for those in safety-critical positions. ... One survey was given to employers and the other was a probability-based survey given to employees. ... The surveys showed a difference in the ways employers and workers view risks and consequences of feeling fatigued at work. A majority (90 percent) of employers reported feeling the effects of fatigue on their workplace, including declines in productivity and safety incidents involving tired employees, but only 72 percent of employees saw being tired as a safety concern. Occupational Health and Safety

Research is scarce on medication use in pregnant women. Experts are urging the government to fix that

1 October - There’s very little research on whether medications are safe and effective in pregnant and lactating women, but an expert panel has ideas for how to close that information gap — and it’s calling on the federal government to take action in a new report that could stir change. The sweeping report is the product of more than a year of public meetings by a task force formed by Congress in 2016 to study why so few women can get reliable answers on medication use while pregnant and lactating. ... The drug industry has long steered clear of research on pregnant or lactating women, citing concerns about safety, liability, and ethics. ... The task force — convened by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development — said it’s not only possible, but critical, to change that. STAT

Sales of JUUL e-cigarettes skyrocket, posing danger to youth

2 October - Sales of JUUL, an e-cigarette shaped like a USB flash drive, grew more than seven-fold from 2016 to 2017, and held the greatest share of the U.S. e-cigarette market by December 2017. ... Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, and JUUL contains among the highest nicotine content of any e-cigarette on the U.S. market. Nicotine is highly addictive and can harm a child’s brain development, which continues into the mid-20s. ... The U.S. Surgeon General has concluded that e-cigarette use among youth and young adults is a public health concern, and that e-cigarette aerosol is not harmless. Over the past several
months, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has taken a series of actions as part of its Youth Tobacco Prevention Plan to more immediately target the illegal sales of e-cigarettes to youth, as well as youth-oriented marketing and appeal of these products. CDC

Sexual assault and harassment may have lasting health repercussions for women

3 October - The trauma of sexual assault or harassment is not only hard to forget; it may also leave lasting effects on a woman's health. This finding of a study published Wednesday adds support to a growing body of evidence suggesting the link. In the study of roughly 300 middle-aged women, an experience of sexual assault was associated with anxiety, depression and poor sleep. A history of workplace sexual harassment was also associated with poor sleep and with an increased risk of developing high blood pressure. ... About 1 in 4 women who had been sexually assaulted met criteria for depression, while approximately 1 in 10 who had not were depressed. Those who experienced sexual harassment at work had a twofold increased risk compared to women who hadn't of developing high blood pressure. Poor sleep was more common, too. NPR

Teens are smoking, vaping and eating cannabis

3 October - Adolescents who try marijuana are not just smoking it. Many are also vaping or eating cannabis, a U.S. study suggests. Almost one in three teens have smoked cannabis at least once, the survey of 3,177 Los Angeles high school students found. More than one in five adolescents have consumed edible cannabis, and more than one in 10 have vaped it. In the study of 10th-graders, two-thirds of teen cannabis users had tried at least two forms of the drug, and about 8 percent had tried all three methods of consuming cannabis. Reuters

Yo-yo dieting tied to heart attacks and strokes, even in healthy people

2 October - People with fluctuations in their weight, blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar may be more likely to have heart attacks and strokes than those with stable measurements, a Korean study suggests. ... [Researchers] examined data collected by the Korean National Health Insurance System from 2005 to 2012 on more than 6.7 million people without a history of heart attacks, diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol. All of these people had at least three health exams during the study period, and researchers followed half of them for more than 5.5 years. During follow-up, there were almost 55,000 deaths, more than 22,000 strokes and more than 21,000 heart attacks. Compared to people with little variation in their weight, blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels, individuals with the most fluctuation in these measurements were about 2.3 times more likely to die during the study period and more than 40 percent more likely to have a heart attack or stroke. Reuters
Democratic Republic of Congo: Attack on Congolese Red Cross Ebola ambulance wounds three volunteers

3 October - Three volunteers for the Congolese Red Cross helping with the burial of an Ebola victim in eastern Congo were injured in an attack by villagers, prompting the International Committee of the Red Cross to suspend burials in the area, health officials said on Wednesday. The attack on an ambulance transporting the body to a cemetery in North Kivu province’s Beni region is the latest disruption to efforts to control the current outbreak, which is believed to have killed 106 people since July. The World Health Organization (WHO) last week raised its assessment of the risk of the disease spreading within the region to “very high” after a case was confirmed near a lakeside border crossing point with Uganda. Community resistance in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has been one of the main problems facing healthcare workers, in addition to armed attacks by militia groups. Reuters

Democratic Republic of Congo/Uganda: Ebola likely to spread from Congo to Uganda, W.H.O. Says

28 September - The risk of Ebola escaping from the Democratic Republic of Congo is now “very high,” and the outbreak already is nearing Uganda, the World Health Organization said on Thursday. The W.H.O. raised its official alert level because of violence by local militias, which has slowed efforts to contain the outbreak, and population movements in eastern Congo, where the latest outbreak erupted in August. But the risk of Ebola spreading globally remains low, the agency said. Since 2000, Uganda has had three Ebola outbreaks, with a total of about 600 cases. Although it is a poor country, its health care system is relatively well organized, and its health ministry said it would start a vaccination campaign if it detected cases there. The New York Times

Malawi: Canine rabies vaccination reduces child rabies cases in Malawi

29 September - ... Rabies is an endemic disease in Malawi. ... Evidence shows that if vaccination coverage can reach 70% of the canine population, human incidence will fall. ... Between May, 2012, and May, 2015, there were 12 paediatric rabies cases. In May, 2015, a comprehensive canine rabies vaccination campaign was started in Blantyre, Malawi by Mission Rabies. In Blantyre, they achieved total vaccination coverage in the canine population of 79.3% in 2015, 78.3% in 2016, and 72.3% in 2017. Since these canine rabies vaccination campaigns, only two paediatric patients with rabies have been admitted to Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital (figure), representing a substantial and clinically
meaningful decrease in cases of paediatric rabies. Neither of these individuals lived in areas where the vaccination campaign occurred. The Lancet

Sudan: Chikungunya numbers spike in Sudan's Kassala

2 October - Government officials in Kassala report that 13,400 people have been infected with the mosquito-borne chikungunya fever on Sunday, an increase of 23 per cent in a week time. The Kassala deputy-governor and the spokesman Majzoub Abu Musa Majzoub said that the number of cases, popularly known as Kankasha, has decreased in the locality west of Kassala. “But more cases remain in the eastern part of Kassala.” ... A medical source told Radio Dabanga on Thursday that at least 40 people died of chikungunya fever in eastern Sudan’s Kassala last week. Security officers stopped blood donated by people in El Gezira from reaching Kassala. AllAfrica

USCENTCOM

Afghanistan: Drought is forcing hundreds of thousands of Afghans from their homes

4 October - Afghanistan is besieged by decades of conflict, but more people this year have been displaced by drought than war. The severe drought has dried up riverbeds and water sources, withered crops, and forced 250,000 people from their homes. ... In the barren hills of Badghis, a gravel road winds through a dusty landscape, where wells and rivers have dried up completely. As desperation rises, some families have turned to selling off their daughters, through child marriage, in order to pay off swelling debt. Tens of thousands have fled to urban centres, living under simple tents. Available water, food, and healthcare fall far short of what’s needed. IRIN

Iran: Contaminated bootleg alcohol kills at least 42 in Iran

1 October - At least 42 people have died after drinking contaminated bootleg alcohol in Iran, a government spokesman said. Health ministry spokesman Iraj Harirchi said 16 people had gone blind and 170 had undergone dialysis after trying the tainted drink. In the past three weeks, at least 460 people across five provinces have been hospitalised, with the youngest victim a 19-year-old woman. Alcohol is illegal in Iran but bootleg booze is widespread. However, ethanol is sometimes reportedly replaced with toxic methanol in the contaminated drink. Police in the southern city of Bandar Abbas last week arrested a couple
Iran: World Court orders U.S. to ensure Iran sanctions don't hit humanitarian aid

3 October - The World Court ordered the United States on Wednesday to ensure that sanctions against Iran, due to be tightened next month, do not affect humanitarian aid or civil aviation safety. Judges at the International Court Of Justice (ICJ) handed a small victory to Tehran, which had argued that sanctions imposed since May by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump violate terms of a 1955 Treaty of Amity between the two countries. But U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo rejected the decision. He said the United Nations court, often called the "World Court", had no jurisdiction over the sanctions, which Pompeo said were essential to U.S. security interests. ... Pompeo said the United States had already taken steps to ensure that the sanctions, which it intends to tighten next month, do not impact humanitarian aid — regardless of the court’s ruling. Reuters

Saudi Arabia: Ten die of MERS in Saudi Arabia among 32 cases in last three months - WHO

3 October - Ten people have died among 32 infected with Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in Saudi Arabia since June in a series of clusters of the viral disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday. The latest cases, recorded between June 1 and September 16, bring the global total of laboratory-confirmed MERS cases to 2,254, with 800 deaths, the United Nations agency said in a “disease outbreak” statement on its website. Reuters

Yemen: WHO launches second cholera vaccine drive in Yemen as cases surge

2 October - The World Health Organization said Tuesday it was helping Yemeni authorities with a second round of vaccination against cholera in three hard-hit districts, as cases surged across the war-ravaged country. More than 2,500 people have died of the waterborne infection since the worst cholera outbreak in Yemen’s history began in April 2017, while nearly one million more suspected cases have been reported across the country. Children under the age of five make up nearly a third of all suspected cases. Arab News
Europe: Brexit, health care, and life sciences: plan for the worst

29 September - Negotiations continue between the UK and the EU27 for Brexit plans. Deal or no deal, leaders in health care, pharmaceutical, and life sciences are covering all bases. ... [A]nxiety continues to escalate around a potential no deal scenario. With just over 180 days until the UK exits the EU, several crisis scenarios are being played out to pre-empt possible food and medicine shortages, taking into account possible space constraints and security meltdowns. But health-care, pharmaceutical, and life sciences leaders continue to express concern about what the future could hold—deal or no deal. “Hope for the best, but plan for the worst”, says Niall Dickson, co-chair of the Brexit Health Alliance, an organisation that aims to safeguard the interests of patients, health care, and research during negotiations around the UK’s exit. The Lancet

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Russia: Risk factor policies, morbidity, and mortality in Russia

29 September - Mortality rates in Russia decreased for non-communicable diseases and all other major causes of death between 1980 and 2016 according to the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2016 Study by the GBD 2016 Russian Collaborators, published in The Lancet. As the prevalence of the most important risk factor according to this study—high blood pressure—increased over the past decades, these achievements seem to be primarily due to substance control policies, specifically WHO’s so-called best buys, which resulted in marked declines in tobacco and—more importantly for Russia—alcohol use. The Lancet

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Australia: The projected timeframe until cervical cancer elimination in Australia: a modelling study

2 October - In 2007, Australia was one of the first countries to introduce a national human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme, and it has since achieved high vaccination coverage across both sexes. ... We aimed to identify the earliest years in which the annual age-standardised incidence of cervical cancer in Australia (which is currently seven cases per 100 000 women) could decrease below two annual thresholds that could be considered to be potential elimination thresholds: a rare cancer threshold (six new cases per 100 000 women) or a lower threshold (four new cases per 100 000 women), since Australia is likely to be one of the first countries to reach these benchmarks. ... We estimate that, in Australia,
the age-standardised annual incidence of cervical cancer will decrease to fewer than six new cases per 100 000 women by 2020 (range 2018–22), and to fewer than four new cases per 100 000 women by 2028 (2021–35). The Lancet

Cambodia: The plight of Cambodia’s detained surrogates
2 October - ... Police rounded up the 33 women in late June during a raid on an illegal surrogacy ring. A Chinese national and four Cambodian women were arrested and charged under Cambodia’s anti-trafficking law. Cambodia’s health ministry banned commercial surrogacy in late 2016, but a law is still being drafted. The recent arrests show that the industry continues to thrive in the shadows. China’s rising infertility rate and the scrapping of its one-child policy have also led to an increase in Chinese parents seeking out surrogacy options abroad, although the subject remains taboo. Initially, 32 of the women were placed in the care of the Christian anti-trafficking NGO Agape International Missions. Weeks later, the surrogates were arrested and charged with human trafficking. The Guardian

China: China’s health care crisis - lines before dawn, violence and ‘no trust’
30 September - ... The long lines, a standard feature of hospital visits in China, are a symptom of a health care system in crisis. An economic boom over the past three decades has transformed China from a poor farming nation to the world's second-largest economy. The cradle-to-grave system of socialized medicine has improved life expectancy and lowered maternal mortality rates. But the system cannot adequately support China’s population of more than one billion people. ... Then, there are the scandals. In July, hundreds of thousands of children were found to have been injected with faulty vaccines. The news angered the public, rattling confidence in the government and amplifying frustration with the health care system. The New York Times

China: HIV/AIDS - China reports 14% surge in new cases
29 September - China has announced a 14% jump in the number of its citizens who are living with HIV and Aids. More than 820,000 people are affected in the country, health officials say. About 40,000 new cases were reported in the second quarter of 2018 alone. The vast majority of new cases were transmitted through sex, marking a change from the past. Traditionally, HIV spread rapidly through some parts of China as a result of infected blood transfusions. But the number of people contracting HIV in this way had been reduced to almost zero, Chinese health officials said at a conference in Yunnan province. Year-on-year, however, the number of those living with HIV and Aids in China has risen by 100,000 people. BBC News
China: In Hong Kong, hepatitis E strain jumps from rats to humans

28 September – A man in Hong Kong has been found to have a strain of hepatitis E that had been seen previously only in rats, researchers said on Friday. While rats have passed on several other illnesses to people, this was the first discovery in humans of the rat variation of hepatitis E, a liver disease. Researchers at the University of Hong Kong identified the infection last September in a 56-year-old man who had received a liver transplant in May 2017. He was cured of the disease in March, after which they verified their findings before announcing the case. Dr. Yuen Kwok-yung, chairman of the infectious diseases section of the microbiology department at the University of Hong Kong, called the case “a wake-up call.” And Dr. Siddharth Sridhar, a clinical assistant professor in the university’s department of microbiology, said it suggested that Hong Kong needed to work harder on rodent control. The New York Times

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Indonesia: Palu tsunami - desperate search for survivors amid difficult rescue conditions

1 October - Authorities in Indonesia have begun mass burials for victims of the earthquake and tsunami that hit the city of Palu, as relatives of the missing combed through body bags for their loved ones and the search for survivors intensified. The death toll from the disaster rose only slightly on Monday, to 844, due to difficulties in reaching the areas worst affected by the quake, while the lack of heavy machinery made it difficult to retrieve corpses from the rubble. The casualties are still expected to reach into the thousands in the coming days. At Poboya, in the hills above Palu, volunteers dug a 100-metre-long mass grave and began filling it with hundreds of bodies in bags. Instructions were given to prepare for up to 1,300 victims to be buried, in order to stave off the spread of disease. The Guardian

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Japan: Powerful Typhoon Kong-rey approaches Okinawa, may affect wide area of Japan

4 October - A powerful typhoon is heading toward Okinawa Prefecture and may bring heavy rain to a wide area of Japan over the long weekend, the Meteorological Agency said Thursday. The weather agency warned of strong winds, lightning strikes and heavy downpours. It will arrive about a week after Typhoon Trami traversed the archipelago. The powerful storm killed four, left some areas without power and greatly disrupted transportation networks. Typhoon Kong-rey, the season’s 25th, is forecast to approach Okinawa on Friday and then travel north toward the Korean Peninsula before reaching parts of the Sea of Japan coast and northern Japan over the weekend. Japan Times

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Papua New Guinea: Boy dies of polio in first fatal case in Papua New Guinea outbreak

1 October - A boy has died from polio in Papua New Guinea in the first fatal case since an outbreak of the disease in June. The World Health Organisation said on Tuesday that the boy died in Enga province, one of 14 confirmed cases across the country. Speaking at the launch of a nationwide polio vaccination campaign on Monday, the WHO representative in the country, Luo Dapeng, said that there had been five confirmed cases in Eastern Highlands province, three in Morobe, two in Enga, two in Madang, one in Port Moresby and one in Jiwaka, the Papua New Guinea Post Courier website said. ... The country was declared polio-free in 2000 but the rate of vaccinations has been falling in re

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Thailand: Thailand dengue death count now 80, chikungunya warning issued

3 October - The number of dengue related fatalities reported in Thailand has reached 80, according to the Bureau of Epidemiology. For the first nine months of 2018, Thai health officials have reported 61,917 dengue cases from all 77 provinces. Of this total, 21,966 cases dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) cases and 23 deaths and 683 dengue shock syndrome, including 51 deaths have been reported. Outbreak News Today

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U.S.: African-Americans are disproportionately enrolled in studies that don’t require informed consent

1 October - African-Americans are enrolled in clinical trials that do not require patients to give individual consent at a disproportionately high level, according to a study published Monday. Scientists are allowed to conduct these experiments without obtaining consent from each individual participant because they are testing emergency medical procedures, and often the patients physically can’t respond. ... Twenty-nine percent of the people enrolled in trials for which the researchers could find data were identified as African-American. That stands in contrast to the fact that African-Americans or blacks make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population and about 14 percent of total clinical trial participants. STAT

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October 2018 - Candida auris is an emerging yeast that causes healthcare-associated infections. ... We describe an outbreak of C. auris infections in healthcare facilities in New
York City, New York, USA. ... We identified 51 clinical case-patients and 61 screening case-patients. Epidemiologic links indicated a large, interconnected web of affected healthcare facilities throughout New York City. Of the 51 clinical case-patients, 23 (45%) died within 90 days and isolates were resistant to fluconazole for 50 (98%). Of screening cultures performed for 572 persons (1,136 total cultures), results were C. auris positive for 61 (11%) persons. Environmental cultures were positive for samples from 15 of 20 facilities. Colonization was frequently identified during contact investigations; environmental contamination was also common. Emerging Infectious Diseases

U.S.: Experts say Trump’s EPA is moving to loosen radiation limits

2 October - The EPA is pursuing rule changes that experts say would weaken the way radiation exposure is regulated, turning to scientific outliers who argue that a bit of radiation damage is actually good for you — like a little bit of sunlight. The government’s current, decades-old guidance says that any exposure to harmful radiation is a cancer risk. And critics say the proposed change could lead to higher levels of exposure for workers at nuclear installations and oil and gas drilling sites, medical workers doing X-rays and CT scans, people living next to Superfund sites and any members of the public who one day might find themselves exposed to a radiation release. STAT

U.S.: F.B.I. arrests Utah man in ricin scare at Pentagon

3 October - The F.B.I. on Wednesday arrested a Navy veteran suspected of sending two envelopes to the Pentagon this week that contained raw materials for the deadly poison ricin. The man, William Clyde Allen III, was detained at a home in Logan, Utah. Two envelopes addressed to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and to the chief of the United States Navy, Adm. John Richardson, set off alarms in a mail screening facility outside the Pentagon on Monday. No one was injured. Defense officials had suspected that the letters contained ricin, but a Pentagon spokeswoman said on Wednesday that they actually contained castor beans, the raw material from which ricin is made. She said the F.B.I. was investigating. Another letter suspected of containing ricin was sent to President Trump at the White House on Monday, but was intercepted by the Secret Service. In a statement, the Secret Service said no one was injured. The New York Times

U.S.: FEMA tests 'presidential alert' to 225 million electronic devices

3 October - A nationwide wireless emergency test was sent out Wednesday afternoon, as the Federal Emergency Management Agency conducted its first “presidential alert.” Roughly 225 million electronic devices across the U.S. sounded off at 2:18 p.m. ET for a “Presidential Alert” that read: “THIS IS A TEST of the National Wireless Emergency Alert System. No action
is needed." The alert test, which is FEMA’s first for the wireless emergency system -- and is being coordinated with the Federal Communications Commission -- made a sound similar to an Amber Alert or flood watch warning. ... FEMA officials estimate nearly 75 percent of all mobile phones in the country, including major carriers, will receive the alert. Fox News

U.S.: In rollback of mercury rule, Trump could revamp how government values human health

1 October - The Trump administration wants to change federal rulemaking in a way that could make it easier to allow the release of harmful substances into the atmosphere. It’s making the case with mercury. ... In a proposal sent to the White House on Friday, the Environmental Protection Agency suggested recalculating the costs and benefits of a 2011 rule to limit mercury from coal plants. ... Under President Barack Obama, the EPA estimated that it would cost utilities $9.6 billion a year to comply with the new standards, while limiting mercury would translate into merely $6 million in public health benefits. But the EPA estimated at the time that the soot and nitrogen oxide reductions that would accompany cuts to mercury pollution would save between $37 billion to $90 billion in annual health costs and lost workdays by preventing as many as 11,000 premature deaths and 4,700 heart attacks. But under President Trump, the EPA has published proposals to loosen carbon dioxide limits on power plants, arguing that it was inappropriate to count "co-benefits" such as having less soot in the air. The Washington Post

U.S.: Plan to house migrant children on military bases shelved indefinitely

2 October - The Trump administration appears to have shelved indefinitely a plan that would have housed unaccompanied migrant children on military bases in the southwest. ... HHS officials have reportedly told the Pentagon previously that the use of military bases for the overflow of migrant children was unlikely, and Mark Weber, an HHS spokesman, said via e-mail Tuesday that the plan was "on indefinite hold." Military.com

U.S.: Providers often fail to consider *Ehrlichia* when treating tick-borne infections

1 October - When a patient presents with signs and symptoms suspicious for a tick-borne illness, medical providers in central North Carolina regularly test for Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, but often don’t think about *Ehrlichia*, according to researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The failure to test for *Ehrlichia*, even as more and more evidence suggests that the infection may be just as common as other endemic tick-borne diseases, appears to impact patient care with antibiotics prescribed less frequently when testing is not ordered. ScienceDaily
Belize/Peru: Vampire bats - 2/3s of those tested were found to be *Bartonella* carriers in study

28 September – *Bartonella* are bacteria that cause endocarditis, a potentially life-threatening illness in humans and domestic animals. In Latin America, common vampire bats (*Desmodus rotundus*) are frequently infected by *Bartonella*, and their subsistence on blood creates a risk for bacterial transmission from bats to humans and livestock. A study published in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* ... found *Bartonella* infections in vampire bats are highly prevalent in Peru and Belize, and that *Bartonella* genotypes are distributed widely, rather than clustered geographically. Outbreak News Today

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Brazil: Brazil measles update: Nearly 2,000 imported cases

3 October - The Brazil Ministry of Health reported that as of October 1, there are 1,935 measles cases confirmed throughout the country. In Amazonas, there are 1,525, and in Roraima, 330. All are related to importation. The outbreaks are related to importation, as the genotype of the virus (D8) that is circulating in the country is the same that circulates in Venezuela, a country that has been facing an outbreak of the disease since 2017. Outbreak News Today

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Venezuela: Desperate border crossings, as Venezuela runs short of HIV drugs

3 October - ... [M]ore than a million Venezuelans [have arrived] in Colombia over the past 18 months, driven from their country by economic collapse, growing poverty and severe shortages of food and medicine. ... Since 1991, Venezuela has distributed free antiretroviral drugs to fight HIV/AIDS. The medication keeps the virus in check, while increasing a person’s chances of living a long and healthy life. But like the rest of the country’s public health system, its treatment programme has fallen apart amid an economic meltdown that has triggered the biggest exodus of people in modern Latin American history. First the laboratory tests and regular check-ups stopped, then the antiretroviral drugs ceased, and finally specialist doctors left the country, according to Venezuelan migrants living with HIV. Reuters

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Venezuela: Venezuelan hospital encourages 'kangaroo' baby care to spare incubators

3 October - Venezuela’s largest maternity hospital is asking mothers to care for non-critical premature babies with skin-to-skin contact known as "kangaroo care" rather than in
incubators, as wards struggle with a lack of equipment. At the Concepcion Palacios Hospital last week, doctors held tutorials to show nurses and mothers how to hold newborns against their bare chests inside a pouch or cloth wrap. Researchers have identified kangaroo care - which has gained adherence in countries including the United States, Norway and Finland - as a way of lowering infant mortality and improving developmental outcomes for premature and underweight babies. Reuters