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Army Public Health Center celebrates 75 years of promoting a healthier nation

April 3-9 is National Public Health Week, and its focus is "making America the healthiest nation in one generation." Sponsored by the American Public Health Association, NPHW is a movement to celebrate the power of prevention, advocating for healthy and fair policies, sharing strategies for successful partnerships and championing the role of a strong public health system.

This year, the Army Public Health Center celebrates 75 years of helping to contribute to a healthy nation--through its emphasis on promoting healthy people, healthy animals, healthy workplaces and healthy communities.

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USPACOM

- India: Indians with diabetes may number 120 million in 20 years
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- PAHO reports more than 500 new chikungunya cases

U.S. MILITARY

Dentists warn new Tricare rates will cause drop in providers

30 March - Dentists in several states are warning reimbursement rates in the new Tricare dental contract are so low that many providers will be forced to stop participating in the plans and pass on higher out-of-pocket costs to military families. The $2.9 billion Tricare Dental Plan (TDP) contract for the families of active-duty, Guard and reserve troops is set to move from MetLife to United Concordia on May 1. About 1.8 million beneficiaries are enrolled in the program. Military retirees are not impacted by the new contract. Military.com

Do U.S. troops risk brain injury when they fire heavy weapons?

5 April - The U.S. military is trying to figure out whether certain heavy weapons are putting U.S. troops in danger. The concern centers on the possibility of brain injuries from shoulder-fired weapons like the Carl Gustaf. The shell leaves the gun's barrel at more than 500 miles per hour. And as the weapon fires, it directs an explosive burst of hot gases out of the back of the barrel. ... In 2011, the Army equipped thousands of troops with blast gauges — coin-sized sensors worn on the head and shoulders. The gauges ... were designed to measure the intensity of a blast from a roadside bomb. But they also revealed worrisome levels of blast exposure in some troops who were merely firing certain heavy weapons. Last year, the military quietly pulled the blast gauges from wide use, saying they hadn't been useful in detecting brain injuries. ... [A]n Army spokesperson said that the Department of Defense is still using blast gauges in research, including some studies that look at "cumulative low-level blast" effects. NPR

Study: Nearly 40% of VA outpatient antibiotics not needed

31 March - A May 2016 study led by researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that about a third of all oral antibiotics prescribed in US outpatient
Fact Sheet:
Musculoskeletal Injuries

Musculoskeletal (MSK) injuries occur when energy (physical stress) applied to bones, muscles, tendons, joints, ligaments, cartilage, or associated tissues exceeds the capacity for normal tissue function. This can result in trauma to the MSK tissues all at once or as less obvious “micro-traumas” that accumulate over a period of time.

In the Active Duty Army MSK are most frequently attributed to falls, sports, motor vehicle and motorcycle accidents, and parachuting as well as strains/sprains from handling equipment. Fall-related injuries are caused by walking on icy, slippery, or uneven surfaces, getting in and out of vehicles, improper parachute landings, and sports (e.g., basketball, snowboarding or skiing). Sports (e.g., basketball, football) are also a leading cause of medical evacuations during deployment. Some of these injuries can be prevented with better equipment and others with proper technique and training.

Surgeons General emphasize readiness as priority in military medicine

29 March - Readiness is the priority of the Military Health System, the surgeons general of the Army, Navy and Air Force told the Senate Appropriations Committee’s defense subcommittee today. Army Lt. Gen. (Dr.) Nadja Y. West, Navy Vice Adm. (Dr.) C. Forrest Faison III and Air Force Lt. Gen. (Dr.) Mark A. Ediger testified at a hearing on defense health.

“Readiness, without question, remains my No. 1 priority,” West said, noting that Army medicine over the past year launched aggressive efforts to expand access and improve quality for all it serves, including adding 836,000 more specialty care appointments in 2016.

Department of Defense


March 2017 - In 2016, there were 2,536 incident diagnoses of heat illness among active component service members (incidence rate: 1.96 cases per 1,000 personyears [p-yrs]). The overall crude incidence rates of heat stroke and “other heat illness” were 0.31 and 1.65 per 1,000 p-yrs, respectively. In 2016, subgroup-specific incidence rates of heat stroke were highest among males and service members aged 19 years or younger, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Marine Corps and Army members, recruit trainees, and those in combat-specific and “other” occupations. Subgroup-specific incidence rates of “other heat illnesses” in 2016 were highest among females, service members aged 19 years or younger, Marine Corps and Army members, recruit trainees, and service members in combat-specific occupations. During 2012–2016, a total of 572 diagnoses of heat injuries were documented among service members serving in Iraq/Afghanistan; 7.9% (n=45) of those diagnoses were for heat stroke. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

VA, DOD study a major breakthrough for understanding PTSD

24 March - Researchers from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DOD) recently released findings of a new study called Prospective Post-Traumatic Stress disorder Symptom Trajectories in Active Duty and Separated Military Personnel, which examines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms in Veterans, compared...
with active-duty populations. ... According to VA’s National Center for PTSD, the PTSD rate among Vietnam Veterans was 30.9 percent for men and 26.9 percent for women. For Gulf War Veterans, the PTSD rate was 12.1 percent. Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans had a PTSD rate of 13.8 percent. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**Global**

Antibiotic 'link to bowel cancer precursor'

5 April - People who take antibiotics for a long time are more likely to develop growths on the bowel which can be a precursor to cancer, a study suggests. Researchers say this adds to emerging evidence that the diversity of bugs in the gut could have role in the development of tumours. ... But experts warn that the early results need further investigation and say people should not stop taking antibiotics. ... [Researchers] found that nurses who had taken antibiotics for two months or more, between the ages of 20 and 39, were more likely to be diagnosed with particular types of bowel polyps - known as adenomas - in later life, compared with people who had not taken long-term antibiotics in their 20s and 30s. BBC News

Child deaths drop from 14.2 million in 1990 to 7.3 million in 2015

3 April - The world is doing a much better job of keeping babies alive long enough to become children, children alive long enough to become teens and teens alive long enough to fully grow up, according to a report in today's JAMA Pediatrics. ... But it’s not all good news. The children in poor countries who might have died as babies or toddlers a few years ago live long enough to suffer from the effects of birth defects or develop mental health problems or cancer. And increasingly, they live long enough to bear the burden of war and violence in their countries. NPR

Chronic pain tougher on poorer, less educated adults

April 2017 - Chronic pain hits older adults who have less money and less education the hardest, a new study finds. Adults ages 51 and older in the lowest household wealth and education brackets are not only more likely to suffer from chronic pain than those who are wealthier and higher educated, but they also experience it more severely. ... According to the study, people who did not have high school degrees reported pain scores more than twice as high as those for people with graduate degrees. The least affluent respondents also reported average pain scores that were 78 percent higher than those for the wealthiest
Experts urge huge expansion of online therapy for mental illness

3 April - A “massive and growing” mental health burden across the world can only be tackled successfully with a major expansion of online psychiatric resources such as virtual clinics and web-based psychotherapies, specialists said on Tuesday. With resources tight and the global mental health system only serving around 10 percent of patients even now, specialists speaking at the European Congress on Psychiatry (ECP) said the web is the only option for significant extra treatment capacity. ... Web-based psychological treatments such as online cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) have proven effective in several conditions including depression and anxiety. Krausz said there is also potential for online CBT to be modified for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Reuters

Globe-trotting pollutants pose a larger threat to public health than previously thought

2 April - Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons — toxic air pollutants produced by fuel combustion — are typically treated as a local issue in places with smog and bad air quality. A recent study suggests, however, that these pollutants may actually travel long distances and affect people across the globe. ... The researchers ... found that when PAHs attach themselves to particles in the air, they are actually shielded and protected from reactions in the atmosphere. The result is they travel long distances and don't degrade in the atmosphere. ... [Staci] Simonich explains, “They get pulled into the atmosphere and can undergo transport in high-elevation winds, where they’re intercepted and may ultimately come out of the atmosphere due to rain and snow.” Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are considered carcinogenic and the new research suggests global lung cancer risk may be up to four times higher than previously believed. PRI

Heat and exertion tied to heart attacks in healthy firefighters

4 April - Firefighters’ physical exertion and exposure to extreme heat may trigger the formation of blood clots and prevent blood vessels from relaxing – the recipe for a heart attack - a small experiment suggests. Heart attacks are the most common cause of death among on-duty firefighters, and they are much more likely to occur during or shortly after work to subdue a fire, said senior study author Nicholas Mills. ... "We found a direct link between the heat and physical activity levels encountered by firefighters during their duties and changes in blood clotting that would increase their risk of suffering a heart attack," Mills said by email. ... Firefighters’ core body temperatures increased about 2 degrees Fahrenheit on average during the simulation exercises and remained high for three to four hours afterwards. ... Participants had lower blood pressure immediately following the respondents. Women reported 38 percent higher pain scores than men on average.

The Nation’s Health
exercises. ... In addition, the blood became stickier and more likely to form clots, the experiment found. Reuters

International scientific teams find potential approach against parasites

3 April - Research teams from the National Institutes of Health and abroad have identified the first inhibitor of an enzyme long thought to be a potential drug target for fighting disease-causing parasites and bacteria. The teams ... sorted through more than 1 trillion small protein fragments called cyclic peptides to uncover two that could shut down the enzyme. ... The target enzyme, cofactor-independent phosphoglycerate mutase (iPGM), is found in both parasites and bacteria. Several types of parasitic roundworms have iPGM. ... The enzyme also is found in bacteria, including Staphylococcus aureus ... and Bacillus anthracis. NIH

Monoclonal antibody cures Marburg infection in monkeys

5 April - Scientists ... found that an experimental treatment cured 100 percent of guinea pigs and rhesus monkeys in late stages of infection with lethal levels of Marburg and Ravn viruses, relatives of the Ebola virus. ... The study involved giving the animals a therapeutic candidate, MR191-N, which is a monoclonal antibody derived from a person who survived Marburg disease. Monoclonal antibodies are immune system fighters designed to bind to a specific part of an invading virus or bacterium to treat disease. The authors report that two doses of MR191-N were able to confer protection of up to 100 percent when treatment was started up to 5 days post infection. NIH

Rapid 'bacterial fingerprinting' might cut antibiotic overuse

31 March - A new "bacterial fingerprinting" precision test that identifies bacteria at the subspecies level rather than by species could one day help physicians identify pathogenic bacteria faster and reduce antibiotic overprescribing. ... Investigators used a novel polymerase chain reaction–based clonotyping assay made by Seattle-based ID Genomics on Escherichia coli isolates. The test can differentiate pathogens on the clonal, or subspecies level, instead of just distinguishing among species. ... With information about a particular clonotype's potential resistance, a patient can be prescribed the antibiotic best suited to his or her infection. The test, called CloNet, is also very fast. It identified E coli clonotypes directly in patients' urine within 25 to 35 minutes. CIDRAP

Researchers find novel bat coronaviruses, akin to MERS, SARS

5 April - Two new studies shed more light on coronaviruses in bats, one identifying a novel coronavirus similar to MERS-CoV in a bat from Uganda and the other finding wide diversity...
in China that includes strains similar to the SARS virus. The new findings add to an expanding list of coronaviruses identified in bats and strengthen the case that the viruses known to cause severe disease in humans originate in bats. CIDRAP

Scientists find common antibiotic could prevent or treat PTSD

4 April - A common antibiotic called doxycycline can disrupt the formation of negative thoughts and fears in the brain and may prove useful in treating or preventing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to research by British and Swiss scientists. In a specially designed trial involving 76 healthy volunteers who were given either the drug or a placebo dummy pill, those who were on doxycycline had a 60 percent lower fear response than those who were not. ... In the trial, volunteers were given either doxycycline or a placebo and put in front of a computer. The screen would flash either blue or red, and one of the colors was associated with a 50 percent chance of getting a painful electric shock. After 160 flashes with colors in random order, participants learnt to associate the ‘bad’ color with the shock. ... While the fear response was 60 percent lower in those who had doxycycline in the first session, the researchers found that, importantly, other cognitive measures - including sensory memory and attention - were not affected. Reuters

Smoking causes one in ten deaths globally, major new study reveals

5 April - One in 10 deaths around the world is caused by smoking, according to a major new study that shows the tobacco epidemic is far from over and that the threat to lives is spreading across the globe. There were nearly one billion smokers in 2015, in spite of tobacco control polices having been adopted by many countries. That number is expected to rise as the world’s population expands. ... The researchers found there were 6.4m deaths attributed to smoking in 2015, of which half were in just four populous countries – China, India, USA, and Russia. ... Between 1990 and 2015, smoking prevalence dropped from 35% to 25% among men and 8% to 5% among women. High income countries and Latin America – especially Brazil which brought in tough curbs on tobacco – achieved the biggest drops in numbers of smokers. The Guardian

Sweet science: Maple syrup extract might boost antibiotic activity

3 April - An extract that has shown the potential to reduce the amount of antibiotics needed to kill disease-causing bacteria may be sitting in your kitchen cabinet. ... In a series of in vitro tests and experiments on insect models, a team of researchers ... has shown that a phenolic-rich extract from maple syrup—responsible for giving maple syrup its color—has a synergistic effect on commonly used antibiotics, allowing the drugs to permeate bacteria more easily to do their job. By enhancing the effect of the antibiotics, the extract reduced the amount needed to kill bacteria by as much as 97%. CIDRAP
ZIKA VIRUS

Phase 2 Zika vaccine trial begins in U.S., Central and South America

31 March - Vaccinations have begun in a multi-site Phase 2/2b clinical trial testing an experimental DNA vaccine designed to protect against disease caused by Zika infection. The vaccine was developed by government scientists at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIAID is leading the trial, which aims to enroll at least 2,490 healthy participants in areas of confirmed or potential active mosquito-transmitted Zika infection. ... The two-part trial, called VRC 705, further evaluates the vaccine’s safety and ability to stimulate an immune response in participants, and assesses the optimal dose for administration. It also will attempt to determine if the vaccine can effectively prevent disease caused by Zika infection. NIH

Zika poses even greater risk for birth defects than was previously known, CDC reports

4 April – About 1 in 10 pregnant women infected with Zika in the United States last year had a baby or fetus with serious birth defects, according to a study released Tuesday that represents the largest and most comprehensive study of Zika’s consequences for pregnant women. Women infected during the first trimester of pregnancy had an even higher risk of birth defects, about 15 percent, according to the analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These estimates are higher than what U.S. health officials have previously reported and underscore the serious risk for birth defects posed by Zika virus infection during pregnancy. The Washington Post

INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 12:
- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity was low to moderate for most of the country, however some states had moderate to high activity.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal across EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal across PACOM except for the ROK which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity was minimal for locations with available data in CENTCOM and AFRICOM except for Saudi Arabia which had low activity.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity was minimal in Honduras this week based on DMSS
APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 25 March 2017 (Week 12)

Although the percentage of positive influenza A specimens has increased in RHC-E and RHC-P over the past week, overall influenza activity among Army populations continues to decrease.

- **ILI Activity:** Army ILI (influenza-like illness) outpatient visits in week 12 were 9% higher than the same week last year.
- **Influenza cases:** Five hospitalized influenza-associated cases were reported to APHC through DRSi in week 12 and all were non-AD beneficiaries.
- **Viral specimens:** During week 12, 594 of 2025 (29%) lab specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. Of 297 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-A reported 186 (62.6%), followed by RHC-C (86, 29%), RHC-P (19, 6.4%), and RHC-E (6, 2%). CENTCOM did not report any positive influenza A specimens. APHC

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

During week 12 (March 19-25, 2017), influenza activity remained elevated in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus subtype reported by public health laboratories during week 12 was influenza A (H3). The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories increased slightly.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was above the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.
- **Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths:** Six influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. CDC

China: Human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus

5 April - On 31 March 2017, the National Health and Family Planning Commission of China (NHFPC) notified WHO of 17 additional laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus in mainland China. Onset dates ranged from 6 March to 24 March 2017. Of these 17 cases, three were female. The median age is 53 years old (age range among the cases is 35 to 81 years old). ... At the time of notification, there were three deaths, and 14 cases were diagnosed as either pneumonia (4) or severe pneumonia (10). Sixteen cases were reported to have had exposure to poultry or live poultry market. One case had no poultry exposure history. No clusters were reported. To date, a total of 1364 laboratory-confirmed human infections with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus have been reported through IHR notification since early 2013. WHO
ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 12/2017 (20 - 26 March 2017)

- Influenza activity across the region continued to decrease with the great majority of countries reporting low intensity.
- The number of influenza virus detections further decreased, but the proportion of influenza virus detections (18%) among sentinel surveillance specimens remained at the same level as the previous week.
- This was the second week during the season that the proportion of type B viruses exceeded the proportion of type A viruses in sentinel detections, as is commonly seen in the second half of an influenza season. However, the overall number of type B virus detections remained low.

European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO

Europe: Excess all-cause and influenza-attributable mortality in Europe, December 2016 to February 2017

6 April - Since December 2016, excess all-cause mortality was observed in many European countries, especially among people aged ≥ 65 years. We estimated all-cause and influenza-attributable mortality in 19 European countries/regions. Excess mortality was primarily explained by circulation of influenza virus A(H3N2). Cold weather snaps contributed in some countries. The pattern was similar to the last major influenza A(H3N2) season in 2014/15 in Europe, although starting earlier in line with the early influenza season start.

Eurosurveillance

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

2017 Week 12 (through 25 March 2017):

- Influenza: Sixteen cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (15 influenza A/H3 and one influenza B) among US military basic trainees were laboratory-confirmed at MRCD San Diego. New cases presented for care 1-13 March. All had been vaccinated less than 14 days prior to illness.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at Fort Benning. Naval Health Research Center

Study: Vaccine halves risk of death from flu in kids

4 April - A study yesterday in the journal Pediatrics demonstrates for the first time that flu vaccines help prevent deaths in children with lab-confirmed influenza infection. The results come from data collected over a period of 4 years by researchers at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). ... According to the study, influenza vaccine effectiveness was 65% (95% confidence interval, 54% to 74%) against laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated deaths among healthy children, and vaccination reduced the risk of flu-associated death by half (51%) among children with underlying high-risk medical conditions. CIDRAP
USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During 12 - 25 March 2017 (Surveillance Weeks 11 & 12), a total of 408 specimens were collected from 51 locations. Results were finalized for 275 specimens from 44 locations. During Week 11, two influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, one influenza A/not subtyped, 42 influenza A(H3N2), and 48 influenza B viruses were identified. During Week 12, three influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, 41 influenza A(H3N2), and 35 influenza B viruses were identified. Approximately 42% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 11. Approximately 44% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 12. The influenza percent positive for the season is approximately 37%.

US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

WHO: Influenza Update

3 April - Influenza activity in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere continued to decrease. Worldwide, influenza A(H3N2) and influenza B viruses were predominant during this reporting period. In South Asia, influenza activity with mainly influenza A(H1N1) remained elevated. WHO

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Listeria monocytogenes can hide inside lettuce leaves

31 March - A new research study from Purdue University that was published in the Journal of Food Protection has found that Listeria monocytogenes bacteria can hide inside the leaves of romaine lettuce. That suggests that traditional post-harvest sanitation practices “may not be sufficient to kill the potentially lethal pathogen.” ... In the study, Dr. Amanda Deering, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Food Science, showed that the bacteria can live within lettuce in every state of the plant growth process. The pathogenic bacteria can get into the plant through cracked seed coats, small tears in the root during germination, and damaged plant tissue. In fact, exposing the lettuce to bacteria can cause infection of the plant tissue in 30 minutes. ... Their research showed that Listeria bacteria can persist up to 60 days in romaine lettuce. Food Poisoning Bulletin

Lethal brain disease seen in Hawaii

6 April - During the past 3 months, there have been six cases of the parasitic brain infection known as rat lungworm disease on the Hawaiian island of Maui, which is triple the number reported on that island in the past 10 years, according to a report in STAT News. The disease, carried by rats and transmitted by slugs and snails, results in potentially fatal
meningitis. ... For prevention of the infection, officials recommend that all fruit and vegetables be thoroughly washed before eating. Simply killing or burying the slugs isn’t sufficient to keep rats from eating them and perpetuating the life cycle. MedPage Today

Russia funds FAO effort to address AMR in food, on farms

3 April - Russia is investing about $3.25 million in an effort led by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to promote food safety and prevent the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in food and on farms, the FAO said in a press release today. The FAO project in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan will assist national officials in combating resistance threats. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

States need $100M for FSMA, $47M for antibiotic resistance, group says

4 April - State agencies need about $100 million for implementing the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and $47 million for antimicrobial resistance efforts, among other public health spending initiatives, according to a letter to Congress yesterday from the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture. CIDRAP Stewardship/Resistance Scan (third item)

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WELLNESS

Birth control causes depression? Not so fast

3 April – … [N]ews continues to focus on the concern that hormone-based contraception — like the pill or the patch — causes depression, and that this should lead us to question its wider use. A more nuanced discussion would consider both the benefits and the harms. … [One] study found that those who used hormonal contraception had significantly higher risks of also taking an antidepressant. … But we have to acknowledge the limitations of this type of research. It’s not a controlled trial, and it’s impossible to establish causality.

Women who choose to have sex could also be more likely to consider antidepressant use. Women who are plugged in enough to the health care system to obtain hormonal contraception could be more likely to have their depression appropriately diagnosed and treated. … It’s also possible that an antidepressant prescription isn’t the best measure of new-onset depression. … Previous studies that looked at rates of severe depression did not find a correlation with hormonal birth control use. The New York Times
Cancer patients have 55% greater risk of suicide, study finds

2 April - Cancer patients have a 55% greater risk of suicide than people without the potentially deadly disease, according to preliminary research findings. Previous research has found suicide rates to be higher than in the general population but a paper being presented at this week's European Congress of Psychiatry in Florence, Italy is an attempt to quantify the size of the increased risk. ...[T]he results, derived by pooling data from 15 studies, [is] "extremely preliminary" but nevertheless significant. ... Patients with cancer were found to have a 55% higher suicide rate compared with people without the disease. But the analysis revealed no increased risk of suicide attempts (8,147,762 participants) or suicidal thoughts (42,700 participants) in patients with cancer. The Guardian

Carrying some extra pounds may not be good after all

3 April - ...[T]oday's study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* suggests that being slightly overweight may actually decrease a person's life span, which is more in line with conventional wisdom about weight. ...[T]he newest study ... found a 6 percent increased risk of dying from any cause among individuals with a history of being overweight. Although Stokes says that 6 percent "is only a modest increase," it's still "extremely worrisome" because so many Americans are overweight. ... [Researchers] included people participating in three major studies that lasted between eight and 20 years. Stokes focused on each person's maximum BMI over a 16-year period, which he says makes the findings more reliable than earlier studies that have used a single BMI without regard to whether someone is gaining or losing weight at the time of the measurement. Stokes's study was also more likely to exclude people who had temporarily lost weight due to illness. NPR

Forcing people at vending machines to wait nudges them to buy healthier snacks

31 March - If you wanted a bag of Doritos from one of Brad Appelhans' experimental vending machines, you'd have to wait. The associate professor of preventative medicine at Rush University Medical Center designed a device that fits inside of vending machines and waits 25 seconds before releasing the typical processed snacks. But healthier fare — like peanuts or popcorn — drops instantly. ... The idea is that every second you spend waiting for a snack will make you want it less, similar to how a tax on sugary drinks might get you to buy less soda, Appelhans says. ... During the months Delays to Influence Snack Choice (DISC) was in operation, ... "we saw a roughly 5 percent change in the proportion of healthy snacks" sales, he says. That's roughly the same increase in sales as what he saw when he lowered the price of healthy snacks by 25 cents in the vending machines. NPR

More than 20 percent of US adults have 'high-risk' HPV

6 April - About 1 in 5 U.S. adults under age 60 is infected with a "high-risk" strain of genital human papillomavirus (HPV) that increases the risk of cancer, according to a new report. For
the report, researchers analyzed information from a nationally representative sample of Americans ages 18 to 59 who took part in a health survey from 2013 to 2014. As part of the survey, the participants underwent a physical exam in which they swabbed their genitals, and these samples were tested for DNA from 37 different types of HPV. Fourteen of these HPV types are known as high-risk strains because they are linked with an increased risk of certain cancers. ... About 25 percent of the men were infected with a high-risk strain of genital HPV, compared with 20 percent of women. Fox News

Philip Morris asks for FDA nod to sell heated tobacco device

31 March - Philip Morris International said on Friday it has applied for pre-market approval of its iQOS heated tobacco product with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The world’s largest international tobacco maker, owner of the Marlboro brand, said that if the FDA grants its request, its U.S. affiliate, Altria Group, would be responsible for selling the device in the United States through a licensing agreement. The device heats tobacco enough to create a vapor without burning it, which the company believes makes it less harmful than cigarettes. It has so far sold more than 3 million iQOS devices in Japan. Reuters

Soda or bear claw? Panera to post added sugar in drinks it sells

31 March - Panera Bread appears to be the first major restaurant chain to offer its customers information about the amount of added sugar in the beverages it sells. [Ron] Shaich noted, for instance, that a 20-ounce serving of Dr Pepper contains 64 grams of added sugar — or 14 grams more than the maximum amount recommended for daily consumption under the United States Dietary Guidelines for 2015-20. ... He said a customer would get less added sugar eating one of Panera’s chocolate chip cookies, bear claws or blueberry muffins than drinking a 20-ounce serving of Pepsi. The New York Times

The government’s struggle to hold opioid manufacturers accountable

2 April - To combat an escalating opioid epidemic, the Drug Enforcement Administration trained its sights in 2011 on Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, one of the nation’s largest manufacturers of the highly addictive generic painkiller oxycodone. It was the first time the DEA had targeted a manufacturer of opioids for alleged violations of laws designed to prevent diversion of legal narcotics to the black market. And it would become the largest prescription-drug case the agency has pursued. Ultimately, the DEA and federal prosecutors would contend that the company ignored its responsibility to report suspicious orders as 500 million of its pills ended up in Florida between 2008 and 2012 — 66 percent of all oxycodone sold in the state. ... But six years later, after four investigations that spanned five states, the government has taken no legal action against Mallinckrodt. Instead, the company has reached a tentative settlement with federal prosecutors, according to sources familiar
with the discussions. Under the proposal, which remains confidential, Mallinckrodt would agree to pay a $35 million fine and admit no wrongdoing. The Washington Post

Vaccine credited with HPV virus reduction in Scotland

5 April - A campaign to vaccinate girls against a cancer-causing sexually transmitted infection has led to a dramatic drop in reported cases. Researchers have found a 90% fall in levels of the human papilloma virus (HPV) in Scottish women since the vaccine was made available in 2008. HPV virus types are thought to account for about 90% of cervical cancers. Scientists hope the drop in HPV cases will lead to a significant drop in future cervical cancer cases. ... [Dr Kevin Pollock] told BBC Radio Scotland: "The two HPV types we were vaccinating against - HPV 16 and HPV 18 - cause about 70% to 80% of cervical cancers within Scotland but the vaccine has exceeded our expectations because it appears to have knocked out another three high-risk HPV types which cause about 10% of cervical cancers.

BBC News

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USAFRICOM

Nigeria: Nigeria starts vaccination drive against meningitis outbreak

5 April - Nigeria has started a mass vaccination programme in a bid to stop an outbreak of meningitis. More than 300 people have died of the disease since late last year. ... Nigeria's Centre for Disease Control says 500,000 vaccinations will be administered, but many more doses are needed in order to protect a large part of the population. ... Health officials in Zamfara state told the BBC that many people may be left vulnerable as they only have 10% of the three million doses of the vaccine that they need to immunise people. ... This is the worst meningitis outbreak to hit Nigeria since 2009. ... The predominant type of meningitis causing the outbreak is type C, which is not common in the country. And the most affected group has been children aged five to 14. BBC News

Nigeria: Rapid mapping of urinary schistosomiasis

3 April - ... [R]apid means of mapping schistosomiasis prevalence are carried out either with questionnaires or biomedical testing with reagent strips. Rapid assessment procedure for urinary schistosomiasis ... builds substantially on the perception of respondents about the disease through visible blood in their urine (where applicable). We conducted this present survey in 6 communities of Katsina State, northwestern Nigeria by interviewing and examining the urine of 1, 363 high schools students for the eggs of *Schistosoma haematobium*. A unique discovery in this survey was that contact with unwholesome water bodies, where properly defined, was significantly associated with urinary schistosomiasis,
both as a single index and when combined with itching experience. PLOS

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SURCENTCOM

Saudi Arabia: Ten Saudi MERS cases linked to hospital outbreak

4 April - A MERS-CoV outbreak linked to a dialysis unit at a hospital in Wadi Aldwaser has sickened 10 people, 2 of them with asymptomatic infections, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday in an update covering 18 recent cases in Saudi Arabia. In a separate statement today on an infection reported a couple weeks ago from Qatar, the WHO said investigators are still trying to determine how the man was exposed to the virus. ... Two of the patients in the hospital cluster are healthcare workers, men ages 36 and 39, both of whom are asymptomatic. Six of the cases were detected through contact tracing. CIDRAP

Syria: Syrian refugee numbers pass 5 million mark in region - U.N.

30 March - The number of people fleeing Syria’s civil war into neighbouring states and Egypt has passed the 5-million mark, data from the U.N. refugee agency showed on Thursday. Syrians have poured across their borders into Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq since anti-government protests in 2011 spiralled into a full-blown conflict between rebels, Islamist militants, government troops and foreign backers. After levelling off in 2016, refugee numbers rose this year following the military victory by the government and its Russian and Iranian-backed allies in the northern city of Aleppo. Thomson Reuters Foundation News

Syria: ‘The hospitals were slaughterhouses’: A journey into Syria’s secret torture wards

2 April - ... The hospital, known as 601, is not the only site of torture in Syria. But after it was seen in a cache of photographs showing thousands of skeletal corpses, it became one of the most notorious. Inside the facility, about a half-mile from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s palace, sick prisoners are tortured as they lie shackled to beds crammed with dying men, according to [activist Mohsen al-Masri] and former detainees and military personnel who worked there. Corpses have been piled in bathrooms, outhouses and anywhere else they will fit, then meticulously documented and trucked away for mass burial. In interviews across Lebanon, Turkey and Europe, more than a dozen survivors and army defectors described horrors in Syrian military hospitals across the country for which war crimes lawyers say they have struggled to find a modern parallel. The Washington Post
Syria: Worst chemical attack in years in Syria; U.S. blames Assad

4 April - One of the worst chemical bombings in Syria turned a northern rebel-held area into a toxic kill zone on Tuesday. ... Western leaders including President Trump blamed the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad and called on its patrons, Russia and Iran, to prevent a recurrence of what many described as a war crime. Dozens of people, including children, died — some writhing, choking, gasping or foaming at the mouth — after breathing in poison that possibly contained a nerve agent or other banned chemicals, according to witnesses, doctors and rescue workers. ... Some rescue workers grew ill and collapsed from proximity to the dead. The opposition-run Health Department in Idlib Province, where the attack took place, said 69 people had died, providing a list of their names. The dead were still being identified, and some humanitarian groups said as many as 100 had died. The New York Times

Greece: Austerity measures contributing to declining public health in Greece

5 April - The Greek financial crisis has been growing for decades, but it came to international attention in 2009 when the European Union, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund agreed to impose austerity measures on the country. That agreement further weakened a health care system already struggling. ... Since 2009, Greece’s GDP has dropped 26 percent, unemployment has increased to 25 percent and net income is down 40 percent. [A] lack of planning and limited administrative capacity to implement changes in just one year, as required, has left the health care system in even worse shape. ... Public health expenditures in most of Europe are about 8 percent of GDP; Greece’s are 4.9 percent. Yale School of Public Health

Israel: With healthcare faltering in Gaza, care in Israel is sought after

6 April - For many patients suffering from life-threatening diseases in the Gaza Strip, treatment in neighboring Israel or the occupied West Bank is a much sought-after option. But Israel tightly restricts Palestinian passage from the Gaza Strip, one of its bitterest enemies. Although it exempts from the ban Gazans seeking “life-saving or life-changing
medical treatment” if it is unavailable in the territory, crossing the border isn’t easy. Gaza, an enclave of two million Palestinians ruled by the anti-Israel Hamas movement, suffers from a chronic shortage of hospital beds, medical equipment and specialist physicians, says Ashraf al-Qidra, a spokesman for Gaza's Health Ministry. Egypt, Gaza’s neighbor to the south, is an option for those seeking medical checks, not urgent surgery, and patients who are barred from entering Israel. But the Egyptian government is at odds with Hamas and keeps its own frontier with the Palestinian territory largely closed. Reuters

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USNORTHCOM

Mexico: How diabetes got to be the no. 1 killer in Mexico

5 April - ... Diabetes is the leading cause of death in Mexico, according to the World Health Organization. The disease claims nearly 80,000 lives each year, and forecasters say the health problem is expected to get worse in the decades to come. By contrast, in the U.S. it’s the sixth leading cause of death, with heart disease and cancer claiming 10 times more Americans each year than diabetes. Rising rates of obesity combined with a genetic predisposition for Type 2 diabetes has caused a slow steady rise in the condition in Mexico over the last 40 years. Now roughly 14 percent of adults ... are living with what can be a devastating and even fatal health condition. ... The obesity problem is in part a side effect of Mexico’s economic progress. As wages have risen, the average daily intake of calories has soared. NPR

U.S./Mexico: Also made in Mexico - lifesaving medical devices

31 March - ... Mexican workers churn out millions of medical devices each day, from intravenous bags to artificial respirators, for the global market. ... [T]he medical devices business makes a particularly revelatory case study of the difficulties of untangling global trade. America imports about 30 percent of its medical devices and supplies. The trouble is, these jobs are among the most difficult to relocate to the United States. To ensure the safety of products that often end up inside the human body, medical devices are strictly regulated and require lengthy approvals from the Food and Drug Administration and other inspectors. The New York Times

U.S.: 911 systems are getting old, and the public can be in danger when they fail

1 April - A recent rash of disruptions in antiquated 911 emergency-response systems points up the urgent need for new technology to save lives in the wireless age. But few states or
localities have the financial means to pay for it on their own. On one evening in March, AT&T Wireless customers nationwide found they couldn’t dial 911. … The company said it was a “service issue.” … [I]n October, a malicious Twitter post with a link targeting faulty phone software caused people’s cellphones to repeatedly call 911 in cities across the country in what investigators now think was the largest cyberattack on the country’s emergency-response system, the Wall Street Journal reported. … [T]he incidents demonstrate the need for states and localities to switch to the newest “next-generation” Internet-based technology that … are better capable of handling cellphone traffic that is subject to accidental or malicious misuse. The Washington Post

U.S.: Annual Report to the Nation - Cancer death rates continue to decline

31 March - Overall cancer death rates continue to decrease in men, women, and children for all major racial and ethnic groups, according to the latest Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer, 1975-2014. The report finds that death rates during the period 2010-2014 decreased for 11 of the 16 most common types of cancer in men and for 13 of the 18 most common types of cancer in women, including lung, colorectal, female breast, and prostate cancers. Meanwhile, death rates increased for cancers of the liver, pancreas, and brain in men and for liver and uterine cancer in women. The report finds overall cancer incidence rates, or rates of new cancers, decreased in men but stabilized in women during the period 1999-2013. NIH

U.S.: AT&T wins 25-year agreement to build first responder broadband network

3 April - A unit of the U.S. Department of Commerce, the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet), has selected AT&T to build the first nationwide wireless broadband network for America’s first responders. FirstNet announced the 25-year agreement on March 30 that calls for FirstNet to provide 20 MHz of telecommunications spectrum and success-based payments of $6.5 billion during the next five years to support the network buildout – funding that was raised in previous FCC spectrum auctions – and AT&T to spend about $40 billion during the life of the contract to build, deploy, operate, and maintain the network. Occupational Health & Safety

U.S.: Congress lets states block some Planned Parenthood money

30 March - Republican legislation letting states deny federal family planning money to Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers squeezed narrowly through the Senate Thursday, rescued by an ailing GOP senator who returned to the Capitol after back surgery and a tie-breaking vote by Vice President Mike Pence. … Senate approval sent the legislation to President Donald Trump, who was expected to sign it. STAT
U.S.: Drugmaker GSK recalling nearly 600,000 asthma inhalers in U.S.

4 April - GSK Plc is voluntarily recalling more than 593,000 Ventolin asthma inhalers from U.S. hospitals, pharmacies, retailers and wholesalers due to a defect that may cause them to deliver fewer doses of the medicine than indicated, the British drugmaker said on Tuesday. The company said it had received an elevated number of product complaints about a bulging of the outside wrapper, indicating a leak of the propellant that delivers the medicine. ... The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the voluntary "Level 2" recall, which only affects products in the United States, GSK spokesman Juan Carlos Molina said. The defect does not pose a danger to patients, so they are not being asked to return inhalers they have already purchased. Reuters

U.S.: How hyper-local data make big impacts on public health - new data resources available for workers

April 2017 - Public health advocates are often encouraged to think big. Oktawia Wojcik ... oversees the 500 Cities Project. ... It is the first data analysis of U.S. Census Bureau tracts within the 500 largest American cities that identifies, analyzes and reports on indicators of multiple measures of chronic disease, down to the neighborhood level. Launched in February 2016, the 500 Cities Project is designed to offer stakeholders in cities and neighborhoods across the U.S. the information that will help them make better decisions on allocating funds to target key areas of public health. ... Maps were first made available online in December, and they got an interactive update this spring. The Nation's Health

U.S.: Nuclear plant shutdowns tied to coal pollution, decreased birth weights

4 April - Where communities get their electricity may directly determine their citizens' health and wellbeing, a new study suggests. The research links the shutdown of two nuclear power plants in the Tennessee Valley during the 1980s to decreased birth weights among babies in the area, and pins the blame on increased pollution from coal power plants. "Clearly there was an effect of coal emissions driving pollution and - in turn - infant health," said the study's author Edson Severnini, of Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College in Pittsburgh. Reuters

U.S.: Occupational exposure to pesticides and the incidence of lung cancer in the agricultural health study

April 2017 - ... In the Agricultural Health Study (AHS), we previously reported positive associations between several pesticides and lung cancer incidence. We evaluated use of 43 pesticides and 654 lung cancer cases after 10 years of additional follow-up in the AHS. ... Hazard ratios were elevated in the highest exposure category of lifetime days of use for pendimethalin, dieldrin, and chlorimuron ethyl, although monotonic exposure–response
gradients were not evident. The HRs for intensity-weighted lifetime days of use of these pesticides were similar. For parathion, the trend was statistically significant for intensity-weighted lifetime days (p = 0.049) and borderline for lifetime days (p = 0.073). ... These analyses provide additional evidence for an association between pendimethalin, dieldrin, and parathion use and lung cancer risk. We found an association between chlorimuron ethyl, a herbicide introduced in 1986, and lung cancer that has not been previously reported. Environmental Health Perspectives


7 April - Syphilis rates in the United States have been steadily increasing since 2001, and gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (collectively referred to as MSM) represent a disproportionate number of cases. ... State-specific rate ratios comparing the rate of syphilis among MSM with the rate among men reporting sex with women only ranged from 39.2 (Minnesota) to 342.1 (Hawaii); overall, MSM had a rate of primary and secondary syphilis 106.0 times the rate among men who reported sex with women only. These state-specific rates further highlight the disproportionate impact of syphilis among MSM. Providers should screen sexually active MSM for syphilis at least annually and provide timely treatment according to national sexually transmitted diseases treatment guidelines. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Update

U.S.: The GuLF STUDY: A prospective study of persons involved in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill response and clean-up

April 2017 - The 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster led to the largest ever marine oil spill. Individuals who worked on the spill were exposed to toxicants and stressors that could lead to adverse effects. The GuLF STUDY was designed to investigate relationships between oil spill exposures and multiple potential physical and mental health effects. Participants were recruited by telephone from lists of individuals who worked on the oil spill response and clean-up or received safety training. Enrollment interviews between 2011 and 2013 collected information about spill-related activities, demographics, lifestyle, and health. Exposure measurements taken during the oil spill were used with questionnaire responses to characterize oil exposures of participants. Participants from Gulf states completed a home visit in which biological and environmental samples, anthropometric and clinical measurements, and additional health and lifestyle information were collected. Participants are being followed for changes in health status. Thirty-two thousand six hundred eight individuals enrolled in the cohort, and 11,193 completed a home visit. ... The GuLF STUDY provides a unique opportunity to study potential adverse health effects from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Environmental Health Perspectives
India: Indians with diabetes may number 120 million in 20 years

6 April - The number of diabetes patients in the country is likely to go up to 120 million in next 20 years as against the current 70 million, an official of Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH) has said. Also, on an average every diabetic spends about Rs 25,000 annually to manage the disease and its associated complications. ... "India has the second largest number of people with diabetes which is at 70 million, next only to China which has about 110 million. The New Indian Express

New Zealand: Typhoid cases hit 18

6 April - The number of confirmed cases in the Auckland typhoid outbreak has risen to 18 and is likely to grow. The Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) said there was one more probable case and a further two being investigated. One woman with the illness died last Tuesday. Six others were in hospital. The health service said the outbreak might have plateaued, as only a few new cases had arisen. All cases were connected to the same Samoan Assembly of God church group, which meets in Mt Roskill. Those considered to be at highest risk of contracting typhoid were being closely monitored. Radio New Zealand

Brazil: Animal cases of yellow fever near Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo

5 April - The World Health Organization (WHO) said today that yellow fever continues to march toward Brazil's Atlantic coast, where much of the urban population is unvaccinated against the mosquito-borne disease. Since the country's outbreak began in January in the interior state of Minas Gerais, experts have warned that urban transmission of yellow fever posed a huge threat to Brazil. According to the WHO, as of Apr 3, there have been several suspected epizootic cases of yellow fever currently under investigation in Bahia state along the northern coastal area, including the urban area of Salvador. An epizootic was confirmed to be caused by yellow fever virus infection in the municipality of Feira de Santana, and in the proximity of the urban area of Campinas in Sao Paulo State. In Rio de Janeiro state, epizootics are under investigation near both the city of Rio de Janeiro and near Niteroi, part of the same metropolitan area. CIDRAP
Colombia: More than 250 dead in Colombia mudslides

3 April - There are no more people officially missing after mudslides in Colombia that killed at least 254, the country's president said on Twitter Sunday. Torrential rains Friday night caused three rivers surrounding the southern Colombian city of Mocoa to overflow -- sending a torrent of mud and debris surging through the city. President Juan Manuel Santos said 170 victims had been identified. He said 43 children were among the dead and 22 more had been hospitalized. A further 203 people were injured, many severely. ... More than 1,000 soldiers and national police officers are involved in the ongoing rescue effort, and they are facing enormous challenges. CNN

PAHO reports more than 500 new chikungunya cases

3 April - Nations and territories in the Americas reported 526 new chikungunya cases, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) noted in an update late last week, as the outbreak total tops 2.4 million infections. In the previous week, the region reported 207 new cases, but the week before that, countries logged 7,091 new cases. The case count for 2017 has now reached 12,977, PAHO said in its Mar 31 update. Bolivia accounted for the lion's share of new cases, with 297, to bring its 2017 total to 539. Guatemala reported its first 83 cases of the year, for the next largest jump. And Paraguay and Peru reported 40 and 33 new cases each, respectively. Many countries, however, have not reported on their chikungunya cases for weeks. CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)
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