NOTICE:

There will be no Army Public Health Weekly Update next week. Publication will resume on 23 March 2018.

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- Army to test 'Third Arm' device with more soldiers this spring
- Former Army special victim prosecutor faces court-martial for sexual assault
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U.S. MILITARY

AMVETS unveils new effort with VA to combat veterans suicide

6 March - AMVETS officials on Tuesday announced a new mental health care partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs that’s part of a broader effort by both organizations to better combat suicide among vulnerable veterans. ... The new initiative — nicknamed the HEAL program — comes the same week that VA officials are set to deliver plans to the White House to provide mental health services to every service member leaving the ranks, in an effort to better identify troubled veterans and intervene before they harm themselves. ... The HEAL program (which stands for healthcare, evaluation, advocacy and legislation) includes a new AMVETS-run hotline for veterans to call for guidance on available resources, to be launched March 19. Email and online chat components are also being created.

Military Times

Army to test 'Third Arm' device with more soldiers this spring

2 March - The Army is moving forward with its “Third Arm” technology, which aims to relieve gear-heavy soldiers while improving accuracy. Engineers at the Army Research Lab in Maryland developed a device designed to hold a soldier’s weapon while displacing the weight from the arms to the torso. ... The mechanical arm ... helps reduce the weight a soldier is carrying. Holding a weapon or shield for a long time causes the arm to shake, which can decrease shooter accuracy. ... [Dan] Baechle said some soldiers had problems with the device, which caused the lab to build an improved second prototype. ... Baechle said he wants feedback from more soldiers before the Army fields the system. The second prototype of the system weighs 3.5 pounds and is set to be tested by at least 15 soldiers this spring.

Army Times

Former Army special victim prosecutor faces court-martial for sexual assault

7 March - An Army judge advocate who previously served as a prosecutor on sexual assault cases will face a court-martial, according to a Tuesday release from Military District...
Joint Webinar:
Vital Signs
Town Hall
Teleconference and
COCA Call

Join the 20th US Surgeon General, Acting CDC Director, a CDC subject matter expert, and other clinical and public health professionals for a webinar discussing new data and coordinated efforts by clinicians, public health government, and communities to respond to increasing opioid overdose department visits. This combined webinar joins these two audiences together to provide a discussion on how clinicians and public health communities can work together in coordinating a more robust response to the opioid overdose epidemic.

Date: March 13, 2018
Time: 2:00–3:30 pm ET

Washington. Capt. Scott Hockenberry faces three counts of sexual assault and three counts of assault consummated by battery, the release said. He will be arraigned on Thursday at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The charges stem from a romantic relationship in 2016 with another Army attorney. The alleged victim reported that what began as a consensual relationship of rough sex and domination-submission turned criminal. Army Times

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Fort Carson focuses on recovery after fire forced evacuations

5 March - Fort Carson emergency services are focusing on recovery after a fire forced some soldiers and families to evacuate their homes on the Colorado-based post on Sunday. The wildland fire burned approximately 270 acres near Gate 5 and the Navajo Village housing area, according to Fort Carson. No injuries were reported, and no structures were affected, according to the news release. Personnel from the Navajo Village housing area, the Warrior Transition Battalion and the 10th Special Forces Group complex were evacuated, officials said. After the evacuation, fire and emergency personnel performed clearing procedures, including checking attic access in all housing units to confirm no embers were burning. Army Times
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Horseback riding may relieve combat vets’ PTSD symptoms

2 March - Therapeutic horseback riding may ease symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in combat veterans, a new study finds. After three weekly riding sessions, 32 participating veterans lowered their scores for symptoms of the disorder, known as PTSD, researchers report in Military Medical Research. Moreover, after six weeks, participants experienced a clinically significant reduction in their symptom scores. In other words, they were capable of doing things - such as going to a supermarket - that they might have been unable to do when they started the program. During the therapeutic horseback riding sessions in Missouri, veterans learned and practiced grooming, interacting with the animals and riding them with a leader and two side walkers. Most of the participants were men, and they ranged in age from 29 to 73. Many were veterans of the Vietnam War who had been experiencing posttraumatic-stress symptoms for decades, Johnson said. Reuters
date of page...

Recent return from deployment tied to preterm births for military women

2 March - Military women who give birth within six months of returning from deployment are twice as likely to have premature babies compared to other soldiers, a U.S. study suggests. Researchers examined data on 12,877 births to U.S. soldiers from 2011 to 2014 and found that, overall, 6.1 percent of these deliveries were premature. But for mothers who

February 2018 - This report summarizes available health record information about the occurrence of vector-borne infectious diseases among members of the U.S. Armed Forces during a recent 7-year surveillance period. Information about confirmed, possible, and suspected cases was obtained from electronic reports of reportable medical events (RMEs) and records of diagnoses documented during hospitalizations and outpatient healthcare encounters. Lyme disease and malaria were the most common diagnoses among confirmed and possible cases. Diagnoses of chikungunya and Zika were elevated in the years following their respective entries into the Western Hemisphere. ... For many confirmed cases, documentation could not be found in healthcare databases for positive laboratory tests that would be the basis for confirmation. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

GLOBAL

Broadly neutralizing antibody treatment may target viral reservoir in monkeys

5 March - After receiving a course of antiretroviral therapy for their HIV-like infection, approximately half of a group of monkeys infused with a broadly neutralizing antibody to HIV combined with an immune stimulatory compound suppressed the virus for six months without additional treatment, according to scientists supported in part by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. ... The therapy may have targeted the viral reservoir — populations of long-lived, latently infected cells that harbor the virus and that lead to resurgent viral replication when suppressive therapy is discontinued. The new findings may inform strategies that attempt to achieve sustained, drug-free viral remission in people living with HIV. NIH

Cleaning products tied to faster lung function decline in women

5 March - Women with regular exposure to cleaning products may face a steeper decline in lung function over time, according to an international study. Women who used sprays or...
other cleaning products at least once per week had a more accelerated decline than women who didn’t, the study authors wrote. ... Over the two decades of the study, women not working as cleaners and not involved in cleaning at home showed the slowest declines in lung function. Compared to those women, women who used sprays or other cleaning products at least once a week had a faster decline in lung function. The decline was faster still for women who worked as cleaners. ... For women whose occupation was cleaning, the effect of exposure to cleaning products was only “somewhat less” than smoking a pack of cigarettes every day for 20 years. Reuters

Diabetes is actually five separate diseases, research suggests

2 March - Scientists say diabetes is five separate diseases, and treatment could be tailored to each form. Diabetes - or uncontrolled blood sugar levels - is normally split into type 1 and type 2. But researchers in Sweden and Finland think the more complicated picture they have uncovered will usher in an era of personalised medicine for diabetes. ... The results ... showed the patients could be separated into five distinct clusters.

- Cluster 1 - severe autoimmune diabetes is broadly the same as the classical type 1 - it hit people when they were young, seemingly healthy and an immune disease left them unable to produce insulin
- Cluster 2 - severe insulin-deficient diabetes patients initially looked very similar to those in cluster 1 - they were young, had a healthy weight and struggled to make insulin, but the immune system was not at fault
- Cluster 3 - severe insulin-resistant diabetes patients were generally overweight and making insulin but their body was no longer responding to it
- Cluster 4 - mild obesity-related diabetes was mainly seen in people who were very overweight but metabolically much closer to normal than those in cluster 3
- Cluster 5 - mild age-related diabetes patients developed symptoms when they were significantly older than in other groups and their disease tended to be milder

Global health coalition inks agreement to develop vaccines for MERS, Lassa fever

6 March - ... [A] group of key players in the global health sphere launched an initiative aimed at fast-tracking development of vaccines for diseases that could cause devastating outbreaks. In a major step, that organization known as CEPI — the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations — said this week that it has awarded its first contract, an agreement with an Austrian biotech company to develop vaccines to protect against Middle East respiratory syndrome, or MERS, and Lassa fever. Themis Bioscience, of Vienna, could receive up to $37.5 million to develop and manufacture the vaccines. The privately held company already has Zika and chikungunya virus vaccines in its development pipeline. STAT
Heat a threat to human health in rural areas

February/March 2018 - Contrary to common belief, high temperatures pose as great a risk to human health, if not more, in rural areas as it does in urban areas. ... Researchers looked at epidemiological studies on heat-related mortality in rural and urban areas published between 2000 and 2017. They found the relative risk of heat-related mortality to be about 3.3 percent larger in rural areas in urban areas. The findings showed that it is not heat exposure alone that determines the heat vulnerability, but rather, a slate of population characteristics. “Globally, rural populations are often characterized by lower socio-economic status, greater proportions of elderly people, fewer health care services, fewer media communications and less access to air conditioning — all disadvantages that are likely to lead to greater vulnerability to heat-related illnesses and deaths.” The Nation's Health

New study shows Lassa fever likely induces renal dysfunction

7 March - A new study ... shows that Lassa fever likely induces acute renal dysfunction in a significant portion of patients and is an indicator of mortality. The study looked at the clinical outcomes of 291 patients with Lassa fever treated at the Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital in Nigeria between 2011 and 2015. Overall case-fatality rate was 24%, but patients with signs of major organ damage were much less likely to survive their infections. Patients with either elevated serum concentrations of creatinine, aspartate aminotransferase, or potassium were likely to have a poor prognosis. About 28% of patients showed acute kidney injury, and 37% had central nervous system manifestations of the disease that resulted in complications. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

NIAID scientists assess transmission risk of familial human prion diseases to mice

8 March - Familial human prion diseases are passed within families and are associated with 34 known prion protein mutations. To determine whether three of the unstudied mutations are transmissible, scientists from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, exposed research mice to brain samples from three people who died from a familial prion disease. After observing the mice for about two years, they found two of the mutations, Y226X and G131V, are transmissible. Perhaps more interesting, the Y226X patient sample had previously been preserved in formaldehyde for three days, embedded in wax, and dried on glass specimen slides for several years before being rehydrated for the study. Yet, the sample infected four of eight mice. The finding illustrates the hardiness of prion infectivity and the potential risks associated with prion transmission, potentially through surgery, blood transfusion or tissue donation. Samples for the other two mutations studied were taken from frozen brain tissue that was thawed. NIH
Sorry, adults, no new neurons for your aging brains

7 March - A major study is challenging the widely held view that adult human brains make new neurons. The study of brain samples from 59 people of various ages found no immature neurons in anyone older than 13, scientists report online Wednesday in the journal Nature. "In all of the adult samples we looked at, we couldn't find any evidence of a young neuron," says Shawn Sorrells, the study's lead author. ... The finding challenges decades of research suggesting that new neurons continue to appear in the hippocampus, an area of the brain involved in memory and emotion. It also calls into question claims that both exercise and some anti-depressant drugs could boost the production of new neurons in the hippocampus. NPR

Why more civilians are now learning military-grade techniques to save lives

7 March - ... Once reserved for the battlefield, military medical techniques such as tourniquet application are becoming more widely taught to civilians.... [T]he Stop the Bleed campaign ... trains the public in simple hemorrhage-control techniques that could save lives in an accident, mass shooting or terrorist attack. ... Following the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., President Barack Obama called for an effort to enhance public resilience to mass casualty events. The American College of Surgeons responded with the Hartford Consensus, in 2013, which called for training the public in bleeding-control techniques. "The most common cause of preventable death following injury is hemorrhage," said Babak Sarani, a trauma surgeon at George Washington University Hospital. "The longer someone bleeds, the higher the chance that they are going to die. ... The first person who can help that victim, inevitably, is another civilian.”

The Washington Post

INFLUENZA

APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 24 February 2018 (Week 8):
The overall number of positive specimens continues to decrease in week 8; however, the number of influenza-associated hospitalizations reported in the Disease Reporting System internet (DRSi) increased week 7 from 10 to 14 cases. RHC-Atlantic reported 12 (86%) of these hospitalizations. So far this season, 21% (31) of all hospitalized cases were reported as vaccinated. Outpatient influenza-like illness has also decreased by 39% since last week. Influenza activity may have peaked nationally; however, the season will continue for several more months. APHC
CDC: Flu View - Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 8 (February 18-24, 2018), influenza activity decreased in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** While influenza A(H3) viruses continue to be predominant this season, during week 8 the overall proportion of influenza A viruses is declining and the proportion of influenza B viruses is increasing. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories decreased.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was above the system-specific epidemic threshold in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Mortality Surveillance System.
- **Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths:** Seventeen influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. CDC

ECDC: Flu News Europe

**Week 8/2018 (19-25 February 2018)**

- Influenza activity was widespread in the majority of reporting countries.
- Overall 49% of individuals sampled from primary healthcare settings tested positive for influenza virus, a slight decrease compared to the previous week (51%).
- Both influenza virus types A and B were co-circulating with a higher proportion of type B viruses. Differences in proportions of circulating influenza virus types and A subtypes were observed between countries.
- The majority of severe cases admitted to non-ICU hospital wards were adults infected by influenza type B viruses. Half of severe cases admitted to ICU were adults infected by influenza type A viruses.
- Based on data provided by 20 EU countries to EuroMOMO, excess mortality from all causes has elevated significantly over the past months in the south-western part of the European region, but this increase seems less in some countries.

NHRC: Operational Infectious Diseases - Weekly Surveillance Report

1 March – Influenza cases continued at a basic training center in New Jersey (B/Victoria, B/Yamagata, and A/H3) among recently arrived trainees who had been vaccinated less than 14 days prior.

Febrile respiratory illness cases:

- Military Recruits – 121 positive of 178 tested
- CDC Border Infectious Disease Surveillance and Zika Surveillance - 101 positive of 154 tested
- DoD Beneficiaries – 29 positive of 55 tested. Naval Health Research Center
USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During 11 - 24 February 2018 (Surveillance Weeks 7 & 8), a total of 1,144 specimens were collected and received from 67 locations. Results were finalized for 1,080 specimens from 67 locations. The percent influenza positive for Weeks 7 and 8 were both 40%. The influenza percent positive for the season is approximately 37%.

U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency

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WHO: Influenza Update

5 March - ... Influenza activity remained high in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere while in the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere activity was at inter-seasonal levels. Worldwide, influenza A and influenza B accounted for a similar proportion of influenza detections. Influenza activity remained high in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere while in the temperate zone of the southern hemisphere activity was at inter-seasonal levels. Worldwide, influenza A and influenza B accounted for a similar proportion of influenza detections. WHO

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Multistate *Salmonella* outbreak linked to guinea pigs

6 March - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today announced a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella Enteritidis* infections linked to pet guinea pigs. Nine people in eight states have been sickened, and one person has been hospitalized. There have been no deaths reported in connection to this outbreak. The CDC began investigating this outbreak in late December of 2017 when whole-genome sequencing on three *Salmonella Enteritidis* infections showed a closely related cluster. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

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South Africa blames food firms for world's worst listeria outbreak

5 March - South Africa said on Monday producers of cold meat products were to blame for delays in tracing the cause of the world's worst listeria outbreak, which has killed 180 people in the past year. ... The government, which has been criticized for taking too long to find the cause, had on Sunday linked the outbreak to a meat product known as “polony” made by Tiger's Enterprise Food. It also said it was investigating a plant owned by RCL
Foods that makes a similar product. ... The U.N. World Health Organization called the outbreak the largest ever recorded globally, after 948 cases were reported since January 2017. Reuters top of page...

Three Australians die, more sick in listeria outbreak tied to melons

2 March - Three people have died and 12 others have fallen ill in a national listeria outbreak linked to contaminated rockmelons, and more cases are expected, Australian health authorities said. The outbreak is linked to the melons, also called cantaloupes, from a grower in the eastern state of New South Wales, the state’s food authority confirmed on its website. The produce company, which has not been named, ceased operations and is investigating. NSW Health said late on Friday that all 15 victims are elderly and are spread nationally from Victoria to Tasmania. Reuters top of page...

U.S. Army says mishandled war dogs, will comply with call for reform

5 March - The U.S. Army confirmed on Monday that it had mishandled retired bomb-sniffing war dogs and said it would comply with recommendations in a Defense Department Inspector General’s report that called for reforms. In a report released on Friday, the Inspector General said that canine heroes ... were mistreated by the Army after they returned to the United States. ... The report said that some dogs were left in kennels for up to 11 months, beyond a deadline for giving them away for adoption or re-using them in the military or other government agencies. It said they were mistreated through lack of care and attention, and others may have been put down. Contrary to military rules, new owners were not screened before the Army allowed them to adopt the dogs. ... In some cases, the report said, soldiers who wanted to adopt dogs with which they had worked were not told they had the right to do so. Reuters top of page...

WELLNESS

$1 fentanyl test strip could be a major weapon against opioid ODs

8 March - No drug has fueled the current spike in overdose deaths more than fentanyl. The synthetic opioid claimed two thirds of the record 64,000 such fatalities in the U.S. in 2016. ... Jess Tilley, a harm-reduction veteran in Northampton, Mass., deploys several outreach teams to rural areas. ... Tilley’s most in-demand item is a $1 testing strip that accurately detects the presence of fentanyl, which dealers sometimes add to boost the strength of
illicit drugs. ... Tilley says [low-level drug dealers] began regularly pulling tainted supplies from the market. ... "People say when they get results [from the strips], they're cutting back half of what they're doing, or they're making sure they have someone with them when they get high." Scientific American

CDC updates *Salmonella* outbreak linked to Kratom products

5 March - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have updated the *Salmonella* I 4,[5],12:b:- outbreak linked to Kratom products. The case count now stands at 40 sickened, with 14 hospitalized. That is an increase of 12 patients since the last update on February 20, 2018. Seven more states have reported ill people. Food Poisoning Bulletin

Contaminated cannabis oil causing emergency room visits, NC health officials warn

6 March - State health officials issued an advisory Tuesday warning residents of a "potentially contaminated cannabidiol oil" that has caused a recent spike in hospital emergency room visits. Along with being consumed as an oil, a similar product has been found in electronic cigarettes and vaporizing pens, officials with the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services said in a news release. State health officials are working with Carolinas Poison Center to investigate more than 30 reports since December of consumers of the product who were treated in emergency departments across the state for serious symptoms, including altered mental status, hallucinations, seizures, loss of consciousness and rapid heartbeat. No deaths have been reported. The News & Observer

E-cigarette use exposes teenagers to toxic chemicals says new study

6 March - Teenagers who use e-cigarettes are exposed to significant levels of potentially cancer-causing chemicals also found in regular cigarettes, even when they do not contain nicotine, according to a new study. ... Researchers ... studied urine samples from 104 adolescents in the Bay Area with an average age of 16.4. Sixty-seven used e-cigarettes only and 17 used both e-cigarettes and traditional tobacco cigarettes. They were compared with a control group of 20 non-smoking teens. ... Teenagers who used the e-cigarettes had as much as three times higher level of toxic chemicals in their urine than the non-smoking teens. And, the groups that used both e-cigarettes and smoked tobacco cigarettes also had three times higher level of toxic chemicals than in the e-cigarette-only group. Fox News
FDA chief wants more mail inspectors to stem opioid influx

6 March - The head of the Food and Drug Administration wants to more than double the number of packages his agency inspects for illicit drugs, an effort to stem a deadly flow of opioids that increasingly runs through the international mail supply. FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said Monday he needs more staffers to intercept opioids that are being disguised as other drugs and supplements. ... At a time of massive growth in shipments of packages from China as a result of e-commerce, the FDA, the U.S. Postal service and other government agencies are struggling to intercept shipments of opioids such as fentanyl to U.S. buyers. International shipments processed by the postal service nearly doubled in just three years. STAT

FDA gives more guidance on fiber, added sugars

2 March - Guidance from the Food and Drug Administration issued March 1 included a proposed symbol related to the added sugars line on the new Nutrition Facts Panel of certain products. The FDA also provided additional guidance on what the agency looks for when deciding whether an ingredient meets its dietary fiber definition. The draft guidance on added sugars related to honey, maple syrup and certain cranberry products. ... Ingredients may qualify as fiber if they are non-digestible carbohydrates (with three or more monomeric units) and lignin that are intrinsic and intact in plants. Isolated and synthetic non-digestible carbohydrates (with three or more monomeric units) also may qualify if they are the subject of an authorized health claim or if the FDA rules in favor of a citizen petition. Food Business News

For arthritis pain, Tylenol works as well as opioids

7 March - Opioids are no better than over-the-counter pain relievers for treating the chronic pain of osteoarthritis, a clinical trial has found. Researchers randomized 240 patients with moderate to severe chronic back pain or hip or knee osteoarthritis to either an opioid (morphine, oxycodone or hydrocodone) or to a nonopioid pain reliever (Tylenol or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). The study, in JAMA, used 11-point pain and function scales to measure the effect of treatment, with higher scores indicating poorer results. ... At the end of 12 months, the opioid group scored an average 3.4 on the function scale, and the nonopioid group 3.3, an insignificant difference. On the pain scale, the nonopioid group did slightly better — 3.5, compared with 4.0 for the opioid group. The New York Times
High uptake and use of vaginal ring for HIV prevention observed in open-label study

6 March - Nearly 90 percent of participants in an open-label study of a vaginal ring infused with a drug to prevent HIV are using the monthly ring at least some of the time, according to an interim analysis of study data. In addition, the rate of HIV infection among participants in the open-label study, which has no placebo arm for comparison, is half of what might be expected in the absence of the ring, according to mathematical modeling that has significant limitations. ... Other forms of HIV prevention have proven to provide high levels of protection from the virus. For instance, oral tablets of the medication Truvada for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) reduce the risk of HIV infection by up to 92 percent in people at high risk when taken daily as prescribed, although taking a daily pill can be challenging for some people. NIH

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Jump in overdoses shows opioid epidemic has worsened

6 March - There's more bad news about the nation's devastating opioid epidemic. In just one year, overdoses from opioids jumped by about 30 percent, according to a report released Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The overall increase in opioid overdoses seen in hospital emergency rooms between the third quarter of 2016 and 2017 occurred across the nation. Some parts of the country experienced far greater increases than others while a few reported declines, the analysis shows. "We have an emergency on our hands," says CDC Acting Director Anne Schuchat. "The fast-moving opioid overdose epidemic continues and is accelerating." The largest regional increase occurred in the Midwest, which saw a 69.7 percent jump in opioid overdoses, according to the report. The jump was driven in part by a 109 percent increase in Wisconsin. NPR
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Overshadowed by the opioid crisis: A comeback by cocaine

5 March - The opioid epidemic just keeps getting worse, presenting challenges discussed at length at a White House summit last week. But opioids are not America’s only significant drug problem. Among illicit drugs, cocaine is the No. 2 killer and claims the lives of more African-Americans than heroin does. In a recent study published in Annals of Internal Medicine, researchers from the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that drug-related deaths have grown across all racial groups and among both men and women. The analysis found that between 1999 and 2015, overdose deaths of any kind of drug for Americans 20 to 64 years old increased 5.5 percent per year. The New York Times
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Race bias seen in breast-cancer screening

7 March - The current guidelines for mammographic breast-cancer screening, which are based on data from primarily white populations, may lead to delayed diagnosis in nonwhite women, according to a new report published in JAMA Surgery. An analysis by a team of Massachusetts General Hospital investigators found that racial differences in patients’ ages and tumor stages at the time of diagnosis support the development of guidelines calling for earlier initial screening of some nonwhite women. Harvard Gazette

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U.S. teens still denied morning-after pill

7 March - A new study suggests that some U.S. teens may have trouble getting emergency contraception at pharmacies even though it's legally available without a prescription for consumers of all ages. Researchers had mystery callers posing as physicians or teens call 993 retail pharmacies in five U.S. cities. Four in five pharmacies said they had emergency contraception available for purchase that day, but roughly 1 in ten teens were incorrectly told they were too young to get it without a prescription. Pharmacists were more likely to correctly state that emergency contraception was available without a prescription when teen boys called than when adolescent girls or female doctors called asking on behalf of a 17-year-old patient. Reuters

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USAFRICOM

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Cholera – Kinshasa

2 March - From 25 November 2017 through 23 February 2018, 1065 cases including 43 deaths (case fatality rate = 4%) have been reported from 32 out of 35 health zones in Kinshasa province. From 25 November 2017 through 15 February 2018, 177 stool specimens were collected for testing. Out of the total stool specimens, 83 tested positive for *Vibrio cholerae*, 83 tested negative, and 11 are currently being analysed. Since the end of November 2017, Kinshasa province has been facing an outbreak of cholera. In January 2018, following intensive rains and flooding events, case numbers increased from less than five to more than 100 weekly reported cases. However since mid-January, there has been a downward trend in the number of suspected and confirmed cholera cases. WHO

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Malawi: Malawi cholera death toll rises to 19, health ministry says

5 March - The death toll from cholera in the southern African nation of Malawi has increased from eight to 19, the Ministry of Health said Monday. In a statement, the ministry
said the number of cases has risen from 546 recorded in January to 718 in 13 of Malawi’s 28 districts and a total of 19 deaths. It said the capital, Lilongwe, and northern district of Karonga, which borders Zambia, accounted for the most cases totaling 552 and 14 deaths.

Reuters

Nigeria: Nigeria says 'unprecedented' Lassa fever outbreak killed 110 this year

7 March - An outbreak of Lassa fever, a viral hemorrhagic illness, has killed 110 people this year in Nigeria in an “unprecedented” outbreak that has hit half of the states in Africa’s most populous nation, its disease control agency said on Wednesday. ... In a situation report dated March 4, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control identified 1,121 suspected cases, of which 353 were confirmed positive, eight were probable and 723 were negative. A further 37 cases were awaiting laboratory test results. Last week the World Health Organization said there had been 1,081 suspected cases and 90 deaths reported from 18 of Nigeria’s 36 states. Centres to manage the outbreak had been set up in four states, it said. Reuters

South Africa: Five human rabies cases confirmed since December

7 March - Since December 2017 five human cases of rabies have been confirmed in South Africa. These cases were recorded in patients from Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu Natal (two cases) and the Eastern Cape. Another probable case of rabies was reported from the Free State in December 2017, involving a patient that presented and died with the clinical diagnosis of rabies and suffered an exposure to a domestic cat before falling ill. Outbreak News Today

South Sudan: Human case of Rift Valley fever follows animal infections in South Sudan

6 March - A 17-year-old boy from South Sudan was diagnosed as having Rift Valley fever (RVF), according to the latest weekly outbreak and health emergency bulletin from the World Health Organization’s (WHO’s) African regional office. Officials have now reported 32 cases of Rift Valley fever, including 4 deaths in South Sudan’s suspected disease outbreak. All suspected and confirmed cases have occurred in Yirol East County, South Sudan. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)
USCENTCOM

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia records new hospital-related MERS case

7 March - The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health (MOH) announced a new case of hospital-acquired MERS-CoV in Riyadh, involving a health worker who is likely part of a hospital-related outbreak. The 28-year-old Saudi man is in critical condition after being diagnosed as having MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus). This is the fourth secondary hospital-acquired case reported in Riyadh this week. All of the patients have been men, but the other three were apparently infected as patients. ... Saudi Arabia’s MERS-CoV total cases since 2012 are 1,813, including 735 deaths. Ten people are still being treated for their infections. CIDRAP News Scan (first item)

USEUCOM

France: In France, is wine still a national treasure? Or is it a health risk?

6 March - In France, wine is not a drink; wine is a way of life. ... But wine also poses a significant health risk — or so say the country’s health minister, Agnès Buzyn, and a host of doctors who have rallied behind her. They have launched a bitter debate that has shocked a multibillion-dollar industry and divided ranks even within the French government. ... [Buzyn's] goal is to raise public consciousness about a type of alcohol that can have, in excessive quantities, the same deleterious effects as any other. ... President Emmanuel Macron, Buzyn’s boss, begs to differ ... [and] added that he did not support any heightened regulations. ... [N]ine prominent doctors published an open letter in France’s Le Figaro newspaper on Monday, arguing that “what matters in terms of toxicity is the amount of alcohol drunk” and that “French consumption of alcoholic beverages, although declining for half a century, remains one of the strongest in Europe.” The Washington Post

Germany: Toxic particle linked to diesel kills 6,000 a year in Germany

8 March - Some 6,000 early deaths linked to nitrogen oxides (NOx) are recorded each year in Germany, the Federal Environmental Agency said on Thursday, providing more evidence of the health hazards posed by the toxic particles mostly produced by diesel engines. The figure is likely to add pressure on carmakers and the government as they scramble to slow the demise of the diesel technology in which Germany’s car industry invested billions. The Environmental Agency (UBA) also said that NOx causes one million people to fall ill each
year and that levels of the toxic particle are higher in 70 cities than the limit set under air quality standards. Reuters

United Kingdom: Britain needs to go on a diet, says top health official

6 March - The portion sizes of some of Britain's most popular foods are to be cut, with health officials telling the public it is time "to get on a diet". Public Health England is targeting pizzas, ready meals, processed meat and takeaways, in a new obesity drive. The government agency has also urged the food industry to start using healthier ingredients and encourage the public to opt for lower calorie foods. It is all part of a drive to cut calorie consumption by 20% by 2024. The target will apply to 13 different food groups, responsible for a fifth of the calorie intake of children. BBC News

United Kingdom: Hundreds of mental health patients dying after NHS care failures

5 March - At least 271 highly vulnerable mental health patients have died over the last six years after failings in NHS care, a Guardian investigation has found. Coroners have been so alarmed at the lapses in care that emerged during inquests that they issued legal warnings to 136 NHS bodies, mainly providers of care, between 2012 and 2017. They included mental health trusts, acute hospitals, ambulance services and GP surgeries. ... The coroners identified problems including errors, misjudgments, flawed processes, a lack of staff or beds and poor training. ... The Guardian's analysis of all the notices issued between 2012 and 2017 involving people receiving NHS care for mental health conditions uncovered a total of 706 failings across the 271 deaths. ... The disclosures follow growing concern about the NHS's ability to cope with the fast-rising demand for mental health care. The Guardian

United Kingdom: Russian spy critically ill in UK after 'unknown substance' exposure

5 March - In a case with echoes of the Alexander Litvinenko poisoning, British police are trying to identify a substance that hospitalized a former Russian double agent. Authorities have conducted a major decontamination effort. British media report an ex-Russian double agent was in a critical condition on Monday after being exposed to an "unknown substance." Authorities did not identify the man, but multiple media outlets gave his name as Sergei Skripal, a 66-year-old former general of Russian military intelligence that had been convicted in Russia for spying for the UK. Police said two people had been found unconscious on a bench on Sunday in downtown Salisbury, a city in the south of England. ... The authorities also said there was no known risk to public health, but recommended people contact medical services "as a precaution" if they felt ill. DW
U.S.: Afraid of snakes? Wasps and dogs are deadlier

5 March - Beware the snake, the spider and the scorpion. But know this: You are much more likely to be killed by a bee or a dog. Of the 1,610 people killed in encounters with animals between 2008 and 2015, 478 were killed by hornets, wasps and bees, and 272 by dogs, according to a study published in Wilderness & Environmental Medicine. Snakes, spiders and scorpions were responsible for 99 deaths over the eight years. Using a database published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, researchers found that 72 people annually were killed by "other mammals," which includes horses, cattle and pigs. Only six people a year died from snakebite, and six after being bitten by a venomous spider. Two people were killed by marine animals over the eight-year period, and no one was killed by a rat. *The New York Times*

U.S.: At new health office, ‘civil rights’ means doctors’ right to say no to patients

5 March - The Trump administration is embarking on a sweeping effort to redefine civil rights in health care, with critics accusing the Department of Health and Human Services of sidestepping the rights of patients to soothe a far smaller constituency: conservative nurses, hospitals and other caregivers. The department’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has been greatly strengthening and expanding protections for health care providers who have religious- or conscience-based objections to procedures such as abortion. By way of explanation, officials cite 36 complaints OCR received from, or on behalf of, those working in the health care system from President Donald Trump’s election through early January of alleged affronts to religious beliefs and moral convictions -- from 10 such complaints it had fielded since 2008. ... [T]hose 36 complaints pale against the more than 30,000 total complaints that OCR received during 2017, according to the agency’s latest budget request; most involved alleged breaches of privacy or discrimination against patients. *WLRN*

U.S.: Cold water can be deadly, and coastal Virginia has a new warning system

7 March - It nearly was a perfect morning for announcing a joint effort that could save outdoorsy folks from the dangers of cold water. Skies were partly cloudy, temperatures were trying to reach 50 and the waters around Craney Island were mirror-calm. And the water was a teeth-chattering 43 degrees. Almost the kind of day where the area's legion of kayakers and paddleboarders would think about spending a little time on the water. The Paddle Craft Risk Cold Water Danger system unveiled Tuesday morning by Coast Guard Sector Hampton Roads and the National Weather Service Wakefield will warn paddle sports
enthusiasts of certain hazards. … [Rick] Wester said when the water is between 40 and 50 degrees, as it was Tuesday, a person not wearing a protective dry suit starts to lose dexterity in 10 to 15 minutes. After an hour, the person will become exhausted or unconscious. Death follows soon after. Stars and Stripes

**U.S.: Fall protection training - protective equipment alone is not enough to keep workers safe**

5 March - In 2016, a total of 5,190 fatal work injuries were recorded in the United States, a 7% increase from the fatal injuries reported in 2015. This is the third consecutive increase in annual workplace fatalities in the United States. … [F]alls increased more than 25% for roofers, carpenters, tree trimmers and pruners, and heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers and accounted for nearly 39% of deaths in the construction industry during 2016. Year after year, Fall Protection – General Requirements remains on OSHA’s Top 10 most frequently cited standards. … Per [29 CFR 1926.503], employers must provide a training program for each employee including potential exposure to fall hazards. Occupational Health and Safety

**U.S.: FDA announces new tickborne parasite test for US blood supply**

7 March - The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced today its approval of Imugen *Babesia microti* Arrayed Fluorescent Immunoassay (AFIA) for detecting antibodies to *Babesia microti* (*B microti*) in human plasma samples, and the Imugen *Babesia microti* Nucleic Acid Test (NAT) detecting *B microti* DNA in human whole blood samples, according to a FDA statement. The tests will detect *Babesia* parasites that are transmitted by blacklegged or deer tick. These infections cause babesiosis, the most frequently reported transfusion-transmitted parasitic infection in the United States.

**CIDRAP News Scan** (third item)

**U.S.: Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc on people’s health – Texas should be better prepared next time**

6 March - The National Hurricane Center in January confirmed what many Texans already knew: Hurricane Harvey’s overwhelming rainfall – and the devastation it left behind – was unlike anything recorded in U.S. history. … Texas did not do enough to protect public health this time, but there are ways to minimize the harm before the next storm. … [W]e need to improve [the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality’s] disaster response. … [T]he state should ensure that TCEQ is fully equipped to respond to pollution events by funding additional staff positions and tools, such as a mobile monitoring unit for full-time use in Houston. TCEQ should develop a plan for active air quality monitoring and surveillance. … TCEQ also should share as much information as it can about environmental sampling in real
time. ... Finally, the agency should refrain from making statements about impacts to public health – or absence of impacts – unless data fully support them.

Environmental Defense Fund

U.S.: Jon Stewart, lawmakers slam Mulvaney proposal on 9/11 health program

5 March - Comedian Jon Stewart and a bipartisan group of lawmakers on Monday sharply criticized a Trump administration proposal to restructure an agency that provides health-care assistance to survivors and first responders of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. ... The program, which offers medical benefits to individuals affected by the 2001 terrorist attacks, was established by the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. It was signed into law in 2011 and reauthorized by Congress in 2015, with the NIOSH, an offshoot of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, designated to administer the agency. President Donald Trump's 2019 budget proposed moving the program into the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Several lawmakers on Monday said restructuring the program and shifting its resources would hamper officials’ ability to provide assistance to 9/11 responders and survivors. ... Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-New York) ... questioned the logic behind tinkering with a program that he said “has worked very well.” Politico

U.S.: Mental health funding tied to Florida’s controversial gun legislation

6 March - A piece of legislation under consideration in Florida this week has received a lot of attention because of a controversial provision that would allow some teachers to have guns in schools. But the proposed law would also designate an influx of cash for mental health services. The state has seen three mass shootings in 20 months — at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the Fort Lauderdale airport and now at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland. And the need for more mental health funding has come up twice before — with no cash forthcoming. In today's dollars, Florida is spending 40 percent less on mental health than it did in 2000, notes Melanie Brown-Wooster, president of the Florida Council for Community Mental Health. "That means there are fewer providers or fewer sources that the individuals can access," she says. NPR

U.S.: Noncongenital Zika virus disease cases — 50 U.S. States and the District of Columbia, 2016

9 March - ... In 2016, a total of 5,168 confirmed or probable cases of noncongenital Zika virus disease with symptom onset during January 1–December 31, 2016, were reported to ArboNET from U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Most (95%) cases were travel-associated. Locally acquired disease accounted for 4% of cases, with transmission occurring
in Florida (218) and Texas (six). Forty-seven cases (1%) were acquired through other routes, including sexual transmission (45), laboratory transmission (one), and person-to-person through an unknown route (one). Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

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**U.S.: Strict state gun laws linked to fewer suicides and murders**

5 March - U.S. states with the strongest firearm laws have fewer gun-related murders and fewer suicides than states that take a more permissive approach to regulating these weapons, a new study suggests. Counties in states with strong gun laws had lower rates of firearm homicides than counties in states with weak laws, the study found. In states with weak laws, counties had lower gun murder rates only if neighboring states had strict regulations in place. But states with strong gun laws had lower firearm and overall suicide rates regardless of the strength of laws in bordering states. Reuters

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**USPACOM**

China: Hong Kong women more susceptible to stress than men, HKU mental health study finds

6 March - Women in [Hong Kong] are more susceptible to stress than men, especially when there is pressure from health and family-related events, a University of Hong Kong study has found. “[The study shows] that if a family member is ill, [stress] borne by a woman will be a bit more,” said Professor Eric Chen Yu-hai, research leader and head of HKU’s department of psychiatry. “Perhaps it is because women have been playing the role of carers in our society,” Chen said. … The study … comprised interviews between January and February with 1,514 Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong residents aged 18 or older. More than 54 per cent of those surveyed reported one or more stressful life events in the past year. Between the two genders, women encountered an average of 0.97 major event that was stressful in the past year, compared with 0.83 for men. South China Morning Post

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China: MCR-1-carrying *Shigella* found in China

2 March - Scientists in China have for the first time identified the colistin-resistance gene MCR-1 in a species of bacteria that’s one of the leading causes of diarrhea worldwide. … [T]he scientists report that they identified the gene in a single isolate of *Shigella flexneri* found in pig stool samples from a farm in Guangxi province. The isolate was among more than 2,000 *S flexneri* isolates, mostly from stool samples of patients, screened by the scientists. Since the existence of the MCR-1 gene was first reported in *Escherichia coli* samples from pigs, pork products, and humans in China in 2015, it has been detected in
more 30 countries. But it’s mostly been found in E coli and other Enterobacteriaceae from animals and humans, mainly *Klebsiella pneumoniae* and *Salmonella enterica*. CIDRAP

**USSOUTHCOM**

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**Brazil: Yellow fever circles Brazil’s huge cities**

5 March - “Good morning!” a loudspeaker blared recently in the working class São Paulo suburb called Jardim Monte Alegre. “We’ve got your yellow fever vaccine, and today we’re going house to house! You better wake up because mosquitoes never sleep!” Twenty health workers piled out of cars. Though they laughed and chatted with locals, their mission was deadly serious. Brazil is suffering its worst outbreak of yellow fever in decades. The virus ... is now circling the megacities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, threatening to become this country’s first-blown urban epidemic since 1942. Although there have been only 237 deaths since the hot season began, the fatality rate will explode if the virus reaches the slums. ... To head off that catastrophe, health officials are struggling to vaccinate 23 million people. But the effort has been slowed by what critics call a series of government missteps and the spread of false rumors about the vaccine. *The New York Times*

**Cuba: U.S. makes Cuba embassy cuts permanent after ‘health attacks’**

2 March - Citing mysterious “health attacks” in Havana, the United States said Friday it is making permanent its withdrawal of 60 percent of its diplomats from Cuba, extending an action that has hurt the island nation’s economy and cramped Cubans’ ability to visit the U.S. Last October, the State Department ordered non-essential embassy personnel and the families of all staff to leave Havana, arguing the U.S. could not protect them from unexplained illnesses that have harmed at least 24 Americans. But by law, the department can only order diplomats to leave for six months before either sending them back or making the reductions permanent. The six months expire Sunday. So the department said it was setting in place a new, permanent staffing plan that maintains a lower level of roughly two-dozen people — “the minimum personnel necessary to perform core diplomatic and consular functions.” *Federal Times*

**Venezuela/Brazil: Brazil reports more measles in Venezuelan refugees**

4 March - A 4-year-old Venezuelan child suspected of having measles and pneumonia died on Mar. 2 at the Children’s Hospital in Boa Vista, according to the city of Boa Vista. She was
among the 12 cases investigated for suspected measles, according to a g1.globo report (computer translated). According to the city hall, the child came a few days ago from the city of Pacaraima, on the border with Venezuela, and entered the children’s hospital of Boa Vista. ... Six children have already been diagnosed with the disease in Boa Vista. In addition, six cases of measles in Venezuelan children were confirmed in Roraima in northern Brazil.

Venezuela/Colombia: Half a million and counting: Venezuelan exodus puts new strains on Colombian border town

7 March - ... By January, at least 550,000 Venezuelans were officially residing in Colombia, with nearly half arriving last year alone, according to Colombian officials. Most are fleeing their country’s economic meltdown – one of the world’s largest migrations unassociated with conflict. The pace picked up in the last six months of 2017, with a 62 percent increase in the number of Venezuelans living in Colombia in the second half of that year compared to the first. And they keep coming. Cúcuta’s city centre is full of migrants sleeping on the streets. Most of them have no money. Beggars are everywhere. Underage girls prostitute themselves alongside the roads. Armed gangs, ELN guerrillas, and paramilitaries are said to be widely recruiting desperate Venezuelan youngsters. IRIN
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