

11 April 2014

Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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SecDef and CJCS Sexual Assault Awareness Month Message

Each April the Department of Defense observes Sexual Assault Awareness Month. In this video Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin E. Dempsey discuss the importance of stopping sexual assault in the military and how everyone must do their part to combat this issue.



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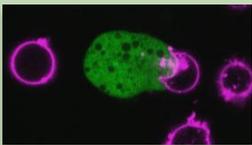
Gut-Eating Amoeba Caught On Film

The gut-eating amoeba can wreak havoc in your intestinal tract and cause a dreadful case of food poisoning that may last months or years.

Now scientists have figured out how this amoeba makes us sick. Its tactics are more nefarious than we thought.

The single-cell animal bites off tiny chunks of intestine, chews on them for a while and then spits them out.

The little parasites — called *Entamoeba histolytica* — don't even have the courtesy to kill your cells before they take a bite. They don't even digest the parts they eat.



U.S. MILITARY

Legionellosis in Military Health System beneficiaries, 1998–2013

March 2014 - Legionellosis is an infection caused by exposure to mist or vapor contaminated with Legionella bacteria. During the 16-year surveillance period, 73 cases of legionellosis were identified in active component service members; 37 were identified among the reserve component; and 1,044 were identified among all other beneficiaries of the Military Health System (MHS). Of the total 1,154 cases of legionellosis, 11 percent (n=126) were confirmed cases (i.e., reportable medical events); 52 percent (n=599) were probable cases (i.e., hospitalizations); and 37 percent (n=429) were suspected cases (i.e., ambulatory visits). Most of the cases (59%) were identified in individuals aged 60 years and older. The annual number of cases increased during the surveillance period and demonstrated a seasonal trend with more cases occurring in the summer and early fall.

[Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#) (page 6)

Military's mental-health system faces shortage of providers, lack of good diagnostic tools

5 April - A nationwide shortage of mental-health providers has made it difficult for the military to hire enough psychiatrists and counselors. The technology and science for reliably identifying people at risk of doing harm to themselves or others are lacking... Spurred by the rise in troop suicides, the Army has launched the [largest-ever study of mental-health risk and resilience](#) among military personnel. Last month, in one of the first publications from that study, researchers reported that even before they joined the military, soldiers experienced higher rates of certain mental illnesses than the general public. In 2010, a \$65 million facility opened at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., devoted to treating traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological problems. Similar centers, set up by the nonprofit Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, have been opened or are planned for other military installations. [Washington Post](#)

Stress hormone tied to crash risk among teens: study

8 April - Newly-licensed teens who produced high cortisol under stress were less likely to be involved in a crash or a near-crash, the researchers found. Measuring cortisol might make a good test to flag young drivers in need of extra safety training, they conclude. "The theory is that people who have a heightened emotional response to certain stimuli may use that emotion to learn more effectively," Dr. Dennis Durbin told Reuters Health. [Reuters](#)

Study examines mental health toll exacted on civilians working with military in war zones

9 April - The punishing psychological toll endured by military personnel in war zones has been extensively documented for years by researchers, perhaps more than ever in the wake

Soldier Medical Readiness Campaign

This month's subjects are

>Initial Entry Training
Injury and Fitness
Surveillance and

>The Efficacy and Safety of
Protein Supplements.

Defense Connect Online
April 14 at 1pm ET

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clearance and a SIPRNet
account.

of recent military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan. But there has been a troubling dearth of research examining the mental health toll exacted on the large numbers of civilians who work with the military in war zones. [A new] study examines the experiences of United States Department of Army civilians working in Iraq and Afghanistan. The workforce of civilians employed by the military... is significant. In 2009, for example, the U.S. Army employed nearly a quarter of a million civilians, with over 6,000 deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan... Bierman and Kelty found that civilians who reported greater exposure to life-threatening experiences exhibited more frequent symptoms of psychological distress, such as depression, anxiety, and anger. The researchers also found that mental health became progressively worse as exposure to threats increased. "It's important to understand that civilian exposure to life threatening hazards may have long-term mental health effects, and we should be offering support to these people," Bierman says. [Medical Xpress](#)

The other wounds

8 April - ...Of the 2.6 million service members dispatched to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, more than half say their physical or mental health is worse than before they deployed, according to a poll conducted by The Washington Post and the Kaiser Family Foundation. But most of those health problems are not the result of gunshots, grenades and roadside bombs: Almost eight in 10 of those reporting health problems - about 1 million of them - say they were not seriously injured in combat. Their wounds stem from the chaos and grind of modern war, the cost of saddling one's frame with a bulky armored vest and extra clips of ammunition, the failure to provide basic safety gear, the mistakes that occur when hulking vehicles are driven by sleep-deprived troops, the eardrum-rattling blasts of gunfire and artillery. During the entire Iraq war, which stretched for almost nine years, the military conducted more medical evacuations by air for troops who had non-hostile wounds than those injured in combat. [Washington Post](#)

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GLOBAL

BrainBriefs: The alcoholic brain, autoimmune epilepsy

4 April - ... Brain autopsies in 20 alcoholic individuals versus 20 matched controls revealed a spectrum of differences in protein types and concentrations that may "provide a molecular basis for some of the neuronal and behavioral abnormalities attributed to alcoholics," according to a British-Spanish research group... Analysis of U.S. insurance claims data on some 2.5 million people found that a diagnosis of epilepsy was nearly four-fold more common among those with autoimmune disorders, according to a report in *JAMA Neurology*. Kenneth D. Mandl, MD, MPH, of Harvard Medical School in Boston, and colleagues, compared the presence of an epilepsy diagnosis in insurance plan members who had any of 12 autoimmune disorders listed in their records -- such as psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, or celiac disease -- versus other plan members. [MedPage Today](#)

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ICU survivors prone to some depression symptoms

7 April - Symptoms of depression, dominated by physical manifestations such as appetite loss, fatigue, and insomnia, were found in one-third of ICU survivors followed for a year after discharge, researchers said. Scores on the Beck Depression Inventory II exceeding a cutoff of 13 (on the instrument's 63-point scale) were seen in 116 of 347 ICU survivors for whom 1-year follow-up was available, according to James C. Jackson, PsyD, of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, and colleagues. Mean somatic symptom scores were markedly higher in these individuals than were affective and cognitive signs of depression -- "even though somatic items account for only 21 of 63 points" on the Beck scale, the researchers said in their report. [MedPage Today](#)

Paraplegics get leg function back with electrical stimulation

8 April - Three more patients with complete lower-body paralysis regained some ability to move their legs and feet voluntarily with electrical stimulation to their spinal cords, researchers said. After obtaining such results in one patient, the subject of a 2011 paper in *The Lancet*, a team based at the University of Louisville repeated the stimulation procedure in three more patients with even better success, they reported online in *Brain*. Whereas the first patient, then 25-year-old Rob Summers, required 7 months of stimulation before he showed any signs of voluntary movement in his lower extremities, the three subsequent patients were all moving their legs, feet, and/or toes within days of starting the treatment. The intervention in all four patients consisted of a 16-electrode array implanted at vertebrae T11 and T12, over spinal cord segments L1 to S1, according to the report from Claudia Angeli, PhD, and colleagues. Epidural stimulation was delivered at varying voltages with frequencies of 25 or 30 Hz. [MedPage Today](#)

Simple blood test could detect cancer early

7 April - Detecting many forms of cancer may soon be as easy as a simple blood test, according to a new study. The blood test, developed by researchers at Stanford University School of Medicine, could also be used to "monitor the amount of cancer in a patient's body," say the researchers, as well as measure their response to various treatments. The test, called CAPP-Seq, for Cancer Personalized Profiling by deep Sequencing, is a refinement of past approaches to measuring the level of tumor DNA in the patient's bloodstream, according to the study. [VOA](#)

Social media helped in probe of Md. rabies death

8 April - Public health investigators say they used Facebook and other social media to find people potentially exposed to the rabies virus after a Maryland man died from the disease last year in a rare case of transmission through a transplanted organ. Social media played an invaluable role in the investigation, the investigators said in an article detailing their work. But investigators must use such tools responsibly to avoid violating patient privacy and

confidentiality, lead author Ryan M. Wallace of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Tuesday... [E]pidemiologists used information from organ donor William Edward Small's Facebook account to reconstruct his social calendar and figure out who he might have had contact with during his infectious period, August to September 2011.

[Washington Post](#)

WHO issues its first hepatitis C guidance

9 April - The WHO today issued its first-ever guidance on treating hepatitis C with the aim of reducing deaths from liver cancer and cirrhosis. The guidelines outline nine key recommendations, including increased screening, ways to mitigate liver damage, how to select an optimal treatment for chronic infection, and steps to bolster prevention in healthcare settings. The 124-page document coincides with the availability of more effective, safer oral hepatitis drugs and the potential for new medicines in the next few years, the WHO said in a news release. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (fourth item)

World Health Day 2014 focuses on big threats from small bites



7 April - Monday marks World Health Day for 2014. The World Health Organization is highlighting the annual observance with information about the increasing threat of vector-borne diseases. More than half the world's population is at risk from diseases such as malaria, dengue, leishmaniasis, Lyme disease, schistosomiasis and yellow

fever, carried by mosquitoes, flies, ticks, water snails and other vectors...More than one billion people are infected and more than one million die from vector-borne diseases every year. WHO says the diseases are entirely preventable. [VOA](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

Northern Command - The percent of outpatient encounters due to influenza-like illness (ILI) or pneumonia and influenza (P&I) both continued to decrease and was below baseline in week 13 (23 March – 29 March 2014) for service members and dependents.

Southern Command - Among local nationals in Peru in week 13, 11 samples were tested and 7 tested positive for flu (3 A/H1, 4 B).

Central Command - The percent of encounters that were ILI or P&I related increased slightly this week but remained below baseline.

Africa Command - Among local nationals in Cameroon in week 13, 6 samples were tested and 2 were flu positive.

European Command - The percent of outpatient encounters due to ILI or P&I decreased or remained stable this week for service members and dependents.

Pacific Command - The percent of outpatient encounters due to ILI or P&I decreased or remained stable in week 13 for service members and dependents. [AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 13 (March 23-29, 2014), influenza activity continued to decrease in most regions of the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** Of 5,206 specimens tested and reported during week 13 by U.S. World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories, 652 (12.5%) were positive for influenza.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the epidemic threshold.
- **Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths:** Three influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.
- **Influenza-associated Hospitalizations:** A season-cumulative rate of 31.7 laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations per 100,000 population was reported. [FluView](#)

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

Report for surveillance through 31 March 2014 (Weeks 12&13):

- During Weeks 12 & 13, a total of 108 specimens were collected and received from 38 locations. Results were finalized for 77 specimens from 37 locations. For specimens collected during Week 12, there were seven influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, three influenza A(H3N2), and nine influenza B identified. For specimens collected during Week 13, there were four influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, three influenza A(H3N2), and three influenza B identified.
- Cumulative results were finalized for 3,184 specimens from 84 locations. There were 1,002 specimens positive for influenza A (902 A(H1N1)pdm09, 84 A(H3N2), one A(H1N1)pdm09 & adenovirus, one A(H1N1)pdm09 & coronavirus, two A(H1N1)pdm09 & parainfluenza, two A(H1N1)pdm09 & RSV, two A(H1N1)pdm09 & rhinovirus/enterovirus, and eight A/not subtyped). There were 66 specimens positive for

influenza B (60 B/unknown lineage and six B/Yamagata). Other respiratory pathogens identified were 62 adenovirus, 32 Chlamydia pneumoniae, 210 coronavirus, 108 human metapneumovirus, 44 Mycoplasma pneumoniae, 66 parainfluenza, 178 RSV, and 322 rhinovirus/enterovirus. To date, 143 non-influenza co-infections have been identified. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview

For week 13/2014:

- Of the 27 countries providing clinical data, Greece and Northern Ireland reported medium intensity and all other countries low intensity.
- A total of 718 sentinel specimens were tested across 25 countries and 121 (17%) were positive for influenza virus. Of these, 117 (97%) were type A, and four (3%) were type B. Of 94 subtyped influenza type A viruses 67 were A(H3) and 27 A(H1)pdm09.
- Five countries reported 92 hospitalised, laboratory-confirmed influenza cases including 51 cases admitted to intensive care units.

Influenza activity is declining towards interseasonal levels. Most of the countries are now reporting low intensity, local or sporadic geographical spread and decreasing trends. The proportion of influenza virus specimens testing positive has substantially decreased this week, with a low level co-circulation of influenza virus subtypes A(H3) and A(H1)pdm09.

[Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 29 March 2014:

Influenza

- Three cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H1N1) among US military basic trainees.
- Influenza activity decreasing among NHRC surveillance populations

FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were at or below expected values. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 29 March 2014 (Week 13)

Influenza A continues to decrease throughout the Army, which follows national and global trends.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 13 were 19% lower than the same week last year.

- Influenza cases: One hospitalized influenza case was reported to USAPHC through DRSi in week 13. To date, 111 cases have been reported during this influenza season: 30 in Active Duty (AD) Service Members (SMs) and 81 in non-AD beneficiaries.
- Viral specimens: During week 13, 91 of 450 (20%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. The most influenza A positive specimens were reported from PRMC (30%), followed by ERM and NRM which accounted for 26% and 22%, respectively. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Experiments render H7N1 virus more contagious in ferrets

4 April - In research that prompted a special review because of "dual use" concerns, scientists conducted experiments that increased the transmissibility of an avian influenza H7N1 virus in ferrets, according to a report released this week in the Journal of Virology (JV). Aiming to identify mutations that might lead to a pandemic strain of H7N1, a subtype not known to infect humans, the scientists serially infected ferrets with the virus. After 10 "passages" in ferrets, the virus had acquired five mutations and was able to spread among them by air without losing any of its virulence along the way, according to the report. "Our results demonstrate that a highly pathogenic avian H7 virus can become airborne transmissible in a mammalian host, and support ongoing surveillance and pandemic H7 vaccine development," say the authors. [CIDRAP](#)

Flu drugs challenged in full data review

9 April - Two major anti-influenza drugs have more limited benefits and greater risks than was previously thought, according to new reviews -- the first to have access to all the clinical trial data. The reviews of the neuraminidase inhibitors oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) -- published by the Cochrane Library and BMJ -- are the culmination of several years of often-controversial research. They call into question the value of the medications both as treatment and prophylaxis, the way drugs are currently approved, and decisions to stockpile the drugs at a cost of billions. The reviews themselves are unprecedented: The drugmakers turned over thousands of pages of previously closely held corporate data on a host of studies. But the manufacturer of oseltamivir, the Swiss pharma giant Roche, said the review process was flawed and led to erroneous results. In a response to a request for comment from MedPage Today, the company said: "We fundamentally disagree with the overall conclusions" reached by the review of oseltamivir. [MedPage Today](#)

Human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus – update

10 April - On 8 April 2014, the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) of China notified WHO of two additional laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus. [WHO](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Multistate outbreak of multidrug-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg infections linked to Foster Farms brand chicken

9 April - The investigation continues into *Salmonella* Heidelberg infections likely related to Foster Farms chicken. Ongoing surveillance identified in February that infections from some of the previously rare outbreak strains again exceeded the number of infections expected to be reported to PulseNet during this time of year. As of April 7, 2014, a total of 524 persons infected with seven outbreak strains of *Salmonella* Heidelberg have been reported from 25 states and Puerto Rico, since March 1, 2013. 37% of ill persons have been hospitalized, and no deaths have been reported. Most ill persons (76%) have been reported from California. [CDC](#)

Is organic better for your health? A look at milk, meat, eggs, produce and fish.



7 April - ...What motivates many organic buyers, particularly the parents of small children, is health benefits, and there are two questions: Do organics do us more good (in the form of better nutrition), and do they do us less harm (in the form of fewer contaminants and pathogens)? Because the risks and the benefits vary by product — meat is different from produce — it's important to look at each category separately. While every category has the potential to harbor pathogens (such as *E. coli* in produce and salmonella in chicken), there are some product-specific concerns, including pesticide residue in produce and hormones in milk. [Washington Post](#)

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WELLNESS

Are you programmed to enjoy exercise?

9 April - ...For years, scientists have been bedeviled by the question of why so few people regularly exercise when we know that we should. There are obvious reasons, including poor health and jammed schedules. But researchers have begun to speculate that genetics might also play a role, as some recent experiments suggest... In their first experiments with these rats, the researchers found some intriguing differences in the activity of certain genes in their brains... In general, [certain genes] worked normally in the brains of the rats bred to run. But their expression was quite different in the non-runners' brains, particularly in a portion of the brain called the nucleus accumbens, which is involved in reward processing. In humans and many animals, the nucleus accumbens lights up when we engage in activities that we enjoy and seek out. [New York Times](#)

Circumcision benefits outweigh risks, study reports

7 April - A review of studies has found that the health benefits of infant male circumcision vastly outweigh the risks involved in the procedure. But the study, published online in Mayo Clinic Proceedings, also found that while the prevalence of circumcision among American men ages 14 to 59 increased to 81 percent from 79 percent over the past decade, the rate of newborn circumcision has declined by 6 percentage points, to 77 percent, since the 1960s. The authors conclude that the benefits — among them reduced risks of urinary tract infection, prostate cancer, sexually transmitted diseases and, in female partners, cervical cancer — outweigh the risks of local infection or bleeding. Several studies, including two randomized clinical trials, found no long-term adverse effects of circumcision on sexual performance or pleasure. [New York Times](#)

E-cig poisoning on the rise

5 April - Poisonings from electronic cigarettes and their nicotine liquid have increased dramatically, the CDC reported. Calls to poison control centers for e-cigarette exposures rose from one per month when monitoring started in September 2010 to 215 per month as of February 2014, Kevin Chatham-Stephens, MD, of the CDC in Atlanta, and colleagues found. E-cigarettes now account for nearly 42% of all cigarette-related calls, the group reported in the April 4 issue of *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. [MedPage Today](#)

Pain relievers tied to heart rhythm disorder

9 April - A new study found that the popular pain relievers known as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or Nsaids, may increase the risk for the most common type of irregular heartbeat, atrial fibrillation. Dutch researchers followed 8,423 people, average age 69, with normal heart rhythm at the start of the study for an average of 13 years. Over the period, 857 developed atrial fibrillation. Compared to those who never used Nsaids — which includes such drugs as ibuprofen and aspirin — current or recent use was associated with an 80 percent increased risk of atrial fibrillation. [New York Times](#)

Percentage of men and women who regularly had insomnia or trouble sleeping, by family income as a percentage of poverty level

11 April - During 2012, the percentage of adults aged ≥ 18 years who reported that they regularly had insomnia or trouble sleeping during the past 12 months ranged from 15.8% for those with family incomes $\geq 400\%$ of the poverty level to 24.8% for those with family incomes $< 100\%$ of the poverty level. For both men and women, the percentage who regularly had insomnia or trouble sleeping decreased as family income increased. At every family income level, women were more likely than men to have had insomnia or trouble sleeping. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

USPSTF praised for preeclampsia guidance

7 April - When it comes to whether or not to treat women at high risk for preeclampsia with low-dose aspirin therapy, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) guidelines are spot on, experts in the field agree. After reviewing 23 studies -- 21 of which were randomized controlled trials -- in which women at a high risk for preeclampsia were given low-dose aspirin, the USPSTF found aspirin therapy yielded risk reductions of 24% for preeclampsia, 20% for intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR), and 14% for preterm birth, according to Jillian T. Henderson, PhD, MPH, of the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research in Portland, Ore., and colleagues. "No harms were identified, but long-term evidence was limited," Henderson and colleagues wrote in the guidelines. [MedPage Today](#)

Vitamin D Blog: Ioannidis paints bleak picture

7 April - There's no "highly convincing" evidence linking vitamin D and any outcome, even musculoskeletal benefits, according to famed research skeptic John Ioannidis and his colleagues. In an umbrella [review of 268 observational studies and meta-analyses published in BMJ](#), they turned up no clear ties between vitamin D intake and several diseases, although there may be associations with a selection of outcomes, they wrote. Even though the vitamin has been associated with 137 outcomes in reports (including skeletal, malignant, cardiovascular, autoimmune, infectious, metabolic and other diseases), the researchers found only 10 had been well studied. The only evidence of benefit appeared to be for birth weight and the mother's vitamin D status; there were "probable" associations with a few other outcomes -- dental caries in children, maternal vitamin D levels at term, and parathyroid hormone levels in dialysis patients. [MedPage Today](#)

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Democratic Republic of Congo: 3,600 raped in DRC in four-year period



10 April - The United Nations has said more than 3,600 women, children and men were subjected to rape and other sexual violence in Congo over a four-year period by the country's defense and security forces or armed rebels. A UN report published on Wednesday documented 3,645 victims of sexual violence between January 2010 and December 2013, with nearly three-quarters of the victim's women. Ranging in age from two to 80-years-old, 73 percent of the victims were women, 25 percent were children and 2 percent were men, the report said. Just over half the rapes documented were committed by members of armed groups that operate in eastern Congo. The remainder were attributed to state agents, including soldiers in the military (FARDC), who were implicated in around one in three rapes.

[Al Jazeera](#)

Italy sounds alarm as 4,000 immigrants land

9 April - Italy said that 4,000 immigrants have reached its shores by boat in the past two days - the highest number since it launched a naval operation to rescue them at sea in the wake of two shipwrecks last year. "The landings are non-stop and the emergency is increasingly glaring," Interior Minister Angelino Alfano told Rai Uno public radio on Wednesday, adding that a corpse had been found on one of the migrant boats rescued. Alfano estimated that 15,000 migrants crossing the Mediterranean had been rescued so far this year and said up to 600,000 migrants from Africa and the Middle East were ready to set off from Libyan shores. He called on the international community to set up "refugee camps" in Libya and said the next six months would be "extremely difficult" because favourable weather conditions meant more would make the crossing. [Al Jazeera](#)

Mali identifies first possible cases of Ebola

5 April - Mali said it had identified its first possible cases of Ebola since the start of an outbreak in neighbouring Guinea, adding to fears that the deadly virus was spreading across West Africa. Three people in Mali had been placed in quarantine and samples sent off to Atlanta in the United States for tests, the government said on state television late on Thursday. "A high-speed intervention team has been created to follow the evolution of the situation on the ground," the statement said. It added that the health of the three suspected victims was showing signs of improvement. More than 90 people have already died in Guinea and Liberia in what medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) has warned could turn into an unprecedented epidemic in an impoverished region with poor health services. [Al Jazeera](#)

Rwanda: Once a nation of death, now a symbol of life

7 April - The Rwandan genocide began 20 years ago, and in articles assessing the consequences, one surprising fact stands out: In public health, Rwanda has risen from the ashes to become Africa's biggest success story. From April to July 1994, 800,000 to one million people died in an explosion of hand-to-hand slaughter orchestrated by extremists in the Hutu-dominated government... With the health system in tatters, deaths from tuberculosis, AIDS and other diseases climbed for years afterward. But slowly under the sometimes brutal but efficient administration of President Paul Kagame, ...all that has turned around. According to World Health Organization data, child mortality has fallen by more than two-thirds since 2000. Vaccination rates are higher than those in the United States, and very few children are reported to be dying of tetanus, whooping cough, diphtheria or measles. Ninety-seven percent of pregnant teenagers see a health worker at least once before giving birth, and 83 percent give birth at clinics or with a health worker present. Eighty-seven percent of H.I.V.-infected Rwandans who should be on antiretroviral drugs are getting them, and new H.I.V. infections have fallen 60 percent. Deaths from malaria have fallen about 85 percent since 2006. Life expectancy has doubled since 1995. [New York Times](#)

West Africa: Ebola outbreak among 'most challenging'

8 April - West Africa's Ebola outbreak is among the "most challenging" ever to strike since the disease emerged four decades ago, the WHO said, as the suspected death toll from the virus hit 111... WHO said on Tuesday that it expected to have to confront an outbreak of the deadly virus Ebola in West Africa for the next two to four months, the Reuters news agency reported. But the United Nations agency said it was not recommending any travel restrictions to Guinea, which has a total of 157 suspected and confirmed cases including 101 deaths, or Liberia which has 21 suspected and confirmed cases including 10 deaths... Some 50 foreign experts have been deployed to help with infection control measures at hospitals and to trace 600 known contacts of infected patients, [WHO medical officer Stephane Hugonnet] said. Most new cases were linked to known transmission chains, which he said was "reassuring". [Al Jazeera](#)

West Africa: Ebola virus disease, WHO update

7 April - As of 7 April, a cumulative total of 151 clinically compatible cases, including 95 deaths had officially been reported from Guinea. Laboratory investigations continue at the Institut Pasteur (IP) Dakar laboratory in Conakry (65 samples tested, of which 34 are positive by PCR for ebolavirus) and at the European Union Mobile Laboratory (EMLab) team in Guekedou (36 samples tested/20 positive). Medical observation is continuing for 535 contacts. There have been no new cases in health-care workers since the last report and no new areas are affected. [WHO](#)

Zimbabwe's flood victims



7 April - The Tokwe-Mukorsi dam project was meant to be the solution to the irrigation and electricity problems facing communities in southeastern Zimbabwe. However, the heaviest rainfall experienced in Masvingo province in more than 40 years resulted in heavy flooding in recent months, culminating in the partial collapse of the dam. Thousands of farmers and their families had to flee their homes, leaving their crops and livestock behind at the mercy of the rising waters. The area was declared a state of disaster in February. More than 20,000 displaced people have now been moved by the Zimbabwean government to the Chingwizi camp on the Naunetsi Ranch several hundred kilometres away. The government has indicated that land in Naunetsi will be allocated to the families affected by the flooding, but almost two months later people are still awaiting compensation. [Al Jazeera](#)

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Egypt: New treatments may defuse viral time bomb

9 April - ...Egypt is said officially to have the highest prevalence of hepatitis C in the world, with 10 to 14 percent of its 85 million people infected, and about two million in dire need of treatment... But Egyptians infected with HCV now have fresh hope in novel treatments. The Egyptian government recently struck a deal with U.S. pharmaceutical firm Gilead Sciences to purchase its new hepatitis C pill Sovaldi at a fraction of its American price. Under the agreement, Gilead will supply a 12-week regimen of Sovaldi to Egypt for 900 dollars, instead of the 84,000 dollars the medicine costs in the United States. Egypt's health ministry is expected to make the drug available at specialised government clinics in the second half of 2014, once local drug registration procedures are completed. Studies have shown that Sovaldi is up to 97 percent effective in curing HCV type-4, the most common strain of hepatitis C among Egyptians. [Inter Press Service](#)

Polio spreads from Syria to Iraq, causing worries

7 April - Syria's polio outbreak has now officially spread to Iraq, the first neighbor of the war-ravaged country to be hit by the crippling virus despite an ambitious Middle East inoculation effort, and global health officials warned Monday that dozens of vulnerable Iraqi children could potentially be infected. The transmission of polio, a highly contagious disease that primarily afflicts children younger than 5 and can lead to partial and sometimes fatal paralysis, reflects one of the most insidious effects of the three-year-old Syria conflict, which has sent millions of refugees across the country's borders and severely undermined its public health system. [New York Times](#)

Saudi Arabia/United Arab Emirates: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) – update

10 April - The Ministries of Health of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recently announced additional laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Globally, from September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a total of 211 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including 88 deaths. [WHO](#)

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United Kingdom: Streptococcus group A, scarlet fever

8 April - Scarlet fever infections in the UK have continued to rise to the highest levels for more than 30 years. Between 24 and 30 Mar [2014] alone, 883 cases were confirmed. A total of 5012 new cases have now been reported since the season began in September 2013, compared with an average of 1420 cases reported for the same period in the previous 10 years. The increases in scarlet fever have been seen across the UK. Whilst most cases of scarlet fever are mild and will resolve within a week, continued vigilance by healthcare professionals remains essential due to uncommon but possible complications. [ProMED-mail](#)

United Kingdom: UK uses health workers in counter-terror plan

10 April - Medical workers, most would agree, have one important job to do: look after the well-being of their patients. However, in the UK, employees of the National Health Service are now being assigned another task: identifying potential terrorists. This new directive comes from the Prevent programme, part of the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy created in the wake of the July 2005 London bombings. As part of this mission, since last year Prevent has been providing mandatory training to employees of the National Health Service (NHS) on how to identify potential terrorists among patients, visitors and other medical staff, and report them to the authorities. [Al Jazeera](#)

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U.S.: Health goal met, White House reviews missteps

9 April - Days after hitting their target of signing up more than seven million people for health insurance, Denis R. McDonough, the White House chief of staff, and other top aides to President Obama gathered last week on the patio just outside Mr. McDonough's West Wing office. In an hourlong interview they requested, the officials said one of their biggest mistakes in the disastrous health care rollout last fall was worrying about the wrong thing. They said they focused too much on their ultimately unfounded fear that not enough insurance companies would participate in the health marketplaces and that premium prices would be too high. In turn, they said, they ignored what became the real problem, a website that was virtually inaccessible in its opening days. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: How public health advocates are trying to reach nonvaccinators

6 April - Whooping cough made a comeback in California last year, which researchers have linked to vaccine refusals. And with new measles outbreaks in Southern California, New York and British Columbia, the debate over vaccination is also spreading. Forty-eight states allow parents to sign a vaccine exemption form — only West Virginia and Mississippi don't. California now requires a doctor's signature on the school form, but parents are still able to find doctors who will sign... A study at Dartmouth College supports that theory. Political scientists surveyed nearly 1,800 parents about the vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR). What they found was that the more skeptical parents are about vaccines, the less likely they are to listen to public service ads or to their pediatricians. Marin County pediatrician Nelson Branco hasn't given up on convincing nonvaccinators. He gave parents an ultimatum in 2012: Vaccinate your toddler against measles, mumps and rubella by the time the kid is 2 years old, or find a new pediatrician. And for some people, it worked. [NPR](#)

U.S.: Lassa fever reported in U.S. traveler returning from West Africa

7 April - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) have confirmed a diagnosis of Lassa fever in a person returning to the United States from West Africa. The patient was admitted to a hospital in Minnesota on March 31 with symptoms of fever and confusion. Blood samples submitted to CDC tested positive for Lassa fever on April 3. The patient is recovering and is in stable condition. [Infection Control Today](#)

U.S., Washington: Mudslide death toll rises to 36, 32 identified

10 April - Authorities in Washington state raised the death toll to 36 on Wednesday from the horrific mudslide that smothered a square mile of the town of Oso. The death toll from

the Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office was one higher than the total Tuesday. Of the 36 known dead, 32 have been positively identified. The 32nd was named Wednesday — Larry J. Miller, 58, who died after multiple blunt force injuries from the March 22 disaster, authorities said. Ten people remain on a list of missing, including two children. [NBC News](#)

U.S.: West Nile monitoring needs upgrade

5 April - The system used to monitor West Nile and other arboviruses in the U.S. is in such disarray that gaps might compromise the ability to detect and respond to outbreaks, researchers reported. From 2004 through 2013, financing for epidemiology and laboratory cooperative agreements between the CDC and state and local health systems fell by 61%, leading to declines in active human surveillance, staffing, mosquito surveillance, and monitoring of dead birds, according to James Hadler, MD, of Yale University School of Public Health, and colleagues... In 2012, West Nile caused 2,873 cases of neuroinvasive disease and 286 deaths, but other viruses in the arbovirus group are also an emerging threat, the researchers noted: In 2013, local transmission of dengue fever was documented in three states, and chikungunya virus was found in the Americas for the first time. [MedPage Today](#)

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Australia: Powerful cyclone closes in on Australia's northeast, evacuations ordered

10 April - Tourists and coastal residents were evacuating parts of the Great Barrier Reef on Thursday as a powerful cyclone intensified in the Coral Sea and made its way towards Australia's northeast. Cyclone Ita is forecast to make landfall on Friday north of the tropical city of Cairns, bringing with it the possibility of widespread flooding and damage, emergency officials said. Wind gusts of up to 280 kmh (175 mph) are forecast, bringing with them torrential rain, according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology said. "The sea is likely to rise steadily up to a level which will be significantly above the normal tide, with damaging waves, strong currents and flooding of low-lying areas extending some way inland," the bureau said. The storm was still classified as a tropical depression when it barrelled across the Solomon Islands late last week, killing at least 23 people near the capital, Honiara, according to the United Nations. [Reuters](#)

Australia: The ice age

10 April - Rising crime rates are the tip of an insidious iceberg, as methamphetamine abuse cases soar in Australia. The methamphetamine drug called ice is the drug of choice among young people, and so powerful that it can take just one hit for its users to become addicted.

Authorities warn of an "ice epidemic"; the number of ambulance call-outs to ice users has multiplied, especially in regional country towns. In the state of Victoria, the state's support lines have been flooded with calls for help and the number of people seeking face-to-face assistance from support services has also risen. In 2012, methamphetamine overtook heroin as the drug injected most often. The easy accessibility of ice makes it a recipe for disaster. Young addicts say it is socially accepted as a party drug and widely used with alcohol. While alcohol-related patients far outweigh ice users in hospital emergency departments, medical staff say the latter are much more dangerous, sometimes taking more than 5 people to hold down a patient. [Al Jazeera](#)

Philippine court upholds birth control law

8 April - The Philippine Supreme Court has struck down a legal challenge to a controversial birth control law that supporters say could transform the lives of millions of poor Filipinos, despite bitter opposition from the country's powerful Roman Catholic Church. "The RH law is not unconstitutional," Supreme Court spokesman Theodore Te told reporters on Tuesday, announcing the ruling denying the petitions to the law filed by church groups. The law requires the government to provide free contraception to the poorest Filipinos, and conduct safe sex education in schools. [Al Jazeera](#)

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Brazil: Rocky Mountain spotted fever

6 April - The Epidemiological Surveillance of Assisi recorded the death of a 21 year old woman in the early hours of 3 Apr 2014 caused by spotted fever. It is the 1st confirmed case of the disease in 2014. According to the nurse responsible for Epidemiological Surveillance of Assisi, Nilza Milk, the probable location of the infestation of the ixodid tick, *Amblyomma cajennense*, i.e. where the young girl was bitten, will be investigated by the Superintendent of Endemic Disease Control. There is suspicion that the tick may have been brought by a paternal uncle who stayed at a ranch of Porto de Almeida during the week before he came to the house. "The location cited by the mother also will have to be investigated, as well as other possibilities," says Nilza. [ProMED-mail](#)

Caribbean: Chikungunya cases approach 20,000

7 April - Cases of chikungunya in the Caribbean have reached 19,682, according to data today from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), up from 18,493 cases a week ago. Martinique continues to report the largest numbers, with 11,400 suspected and 1,284 confirmed or probable cases, the ECDC said. The French side of St. Martin is next, with 2,840 suspected and 790 confirmed or probable cases. Guadeloupe

rounds out the top three with 2,737 suspected and 802 confirmed or probable cases... The chikungunya outbreak is the first known in the Americas and began in December 2013 on the French side of St. Martin. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

Cuba slashes 109,000 health service jobs

8 April - Cuban authorities say they have eliminated more than 100,000 jobs in the nation's national health service, considered one of the pillars of the 1959 revolution. The cuts come as the president, Raul Castro, tries to streamline government as part of a broader economic reform package... Two years ago, Cuba said more than 50,000 jobs in that sector had been slashed. Most of the cuts came in less-skilled positions such as ambulance drivers and hospital support staff. Cuba's health care sector is entirely run by the state. Authorities have said that like other areas of the economy it is plagued by inefficiency, redundancies and bloated payrolls. [Al Jazeera](#)

Latin America: Mercury still poisoning Latin America

10 April - Latin America is not taking the new global agreement to limit mercury emissions seriously: the hazardous metal is still widely used and smuggled in artisanal gold mining and is released by the fossil fuel industry. After the European Union banned exports of mercury in 2011 and the United States did so in 2013, trade in the metal shot up in the region. "Mexico's exports have tripled in the last few years," Ibrahima Sow, an environmental specialist in the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) Climate Change and Chemicals Team, told *Tierramérica*. "And activities like the extraction of gold from recycled electronic goods are on the rise." [Inter Press Service](#)

Peru's most active volcano strikes again



4 April - The eruption of Mount Ubinas, a volcano in southern Peru, continues to cause disruption for locals even days after the explosion. On Monday morning, the eruption spewed smoke, ash and toxic gases for a thousand meters, according to *Peru This Week*. This eruption was one that scientists saw building for days.

People in the nearby village of Querapi were evacuated and relocated last Saturday. The northerly winds were blowing the ash from the volcano to the town just to the south of Ubinas' base. Many others nearby were already suffering from respiratory problems, including those in the town of Ubinas, named after the volcano. Residents of both towns were being provided with safety equipment, reported *El Comercio*. The Civil Defense dispersed protective glasses and masks. The ash that the volcano emits is a dangerous and lingering hazard. It affects not only nearby people, but also animals using the pastures and water that become contaminated. Because of the large area the ash has fallen, cleanup will be slow. The people of Querapi will likely be moving their village permanently to Pampas de Hawai, to avoid additional air quality and health problems the volcano could create. [MSN](#)

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