

15 March 2013

Army Public Health Weekly Update

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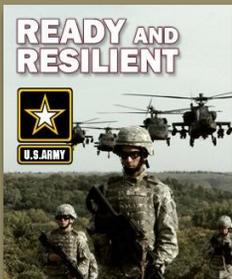
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Ready and Resilient Campaign

The Ready and Resilient Campaign integrates and synchronizes multiple efforts and programs to improve the readiness and resilience of the Army Family - Soldiers (Active Duty, Reserve, National Guard), Army Civilians and Families.

Ready and Resilient creates a holistic, collaborative and coherent enterprise to increase individual and unit readiness and resilience.

Ready and Resilient will build upon physical, emotional and psychological resilience in our Soldiers, Families and Civilians so they improve performance to deal with the rigors and challenges of a demanding profession.



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U.S. MILITARY

Army promises improvements in evaluation of soldiers with PTSD Monday

11 March - Since last summer, the Army has been examining whether its medical professionals have been systematically underdiagnosing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among soldiers. A report the service released Friday concludes the answer is no, but it also

Performance Triad Pilot Program

In early 2013, U.S. Army Medical Command will roll out a new Performance Triad Pilot Program at Fort Bragg, N.C., Fort Hood, Texas, and Joint Base Lewis McChord, Wash., to test a new wellness program with Soldiers before expanding further across the Army.

The Performance Triad Pilot Program returns the Army back to health basics by emphasizing that the Army family get adequate physical activity, nutrition and sleep to be mentally and physically fit and able to perform at their best. Enhancing Soldier and leader knowledge, attitudes and behaviors on these three areas will also help Soldier performance and resiliency, unit, and Army readiness to improve.

found plenty of room for improvement in the military's processes for handling behavioral health issues... To conduct the review, the Army reexamined the records of 154,000 patients who had been diagnosed with four separate behavioral conditions since 2001, including PTSD. The examination wound up revalidating 88 percent of the original diagnoses. "This revalidation rate is extraordinary when you compare it to the diagnostic revalidation rates from the civilian sector," [Lt. Gen. Patricia] Horoho said. [Federal News Radio](#)

DOD's top doctor details sequester's effect on health system

13 March – The Pentagon's top health affairs official today detailed for Congress the immediate and long-term effects of sequestration on the Defense Department's military health care system and its medical mission. Dr. Jonathan Woodson, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, told the House Armed Services Committee that the spending cuts that took effect March 1 will affect patients, staff and facilities. But he emphasized that the Defense Department "cannot and will not" compromise care in the face of the cuts... The department also will ensure that wounded warriors continue to receive the care they need... "To the greatest extent possible, we will sustain our access to our military hospitals and clinics for our service members, their families, retirees and their families," he said. "But sustaining patient care functions during sequestration comes at a cost. "The department will reduce funding from a wide range of other essential investments," he continued... Civilian employee furloughs are another factor. "Forty percent of our military medical centers are staffed by civilians, and as a result of the furlough program, access may be impacted," Woodson said. [Defense.gov](#)

Hagel orders review of U.S. Air Force handling of sex assault case

12 March - Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has asked the Pentagon's top lawyer to review a recent sexual assault case and assess whether commanding officers should have the power under military law to overturn a jury verdict, according to a letter released on Monday. The review could have far-reaching consequences for the military judicial system, which grants the "convening authority" - the general responsible for a court martial proceeding - the ability to review a verdict from a jury trial and modify or dismiss it. [Chicago Tribune](#)

Incidence of genital warts among U.S. service members before and after the introduction of the quadrivalent human papillomavirus vaccine

February 2013 - ...During each year of the study period except 2012, crude incidence rates of [genital warts] GWs were higher among females than males. Among females, incidence rates were markedly higher among those younger than 30 years versus older; and were highest among the youngest (<21 years), intermediate among the 21-24-year-olds, and relatively low among the oldest (25-29 years). Among women younger than 25 years, annual incidence rates of GWs sharply declined from 2007 through 2010. In contrast, among

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women 25 years and older and men of all age groups, annual rates of GW diagnoses remained relatively low and stable from 2000 through 2010. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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GLOBAL

Antibiotic resistance a "catastrophic threat": UK medical chief

1 March - Antibiotic resistance poses a catastrophic threat to medicine and could mean patients having minor surgery risk dying from infections that can no longer be treated, Britain's top health official said on Monday. Sally Davies, the chief medical officer for England, said global action is needed to fight antibiotic, or antimicrobial, resistance and fill a drug "discovery void" by researching and developing new medicines to treat emerging, mutating infections. Only a handful of new antibiotics have been developed and brought to market in the past few decades, and it is a race against time to find more, as bacterial infections increasingly evolve into "superbugs" resistant to existing drugs. [Reuters](#)

Drugmakers, Interpol ramp up fight against fakes

12 March - More than two dozen of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies have agreed to provide funding and other support to Interpol's battle against counterfeit prescription drugs, the international police agency said Tuesday. Interpol's newly created Pharmaceutical Crime Program aims to help health agencies, police and customs bureaus in countries around the globe stem the supply of bogus brand-name and generic medicines, as well as identify and dismantle the organized crime rings distributing them. Those rings, which operate across borders, are raking in billions of dollars every year, costing legitimate drugmakers a small fortune in lost sales. Meanwhile patients who unknowingly take counterfeit drugs often are poisoned or get sicker because they're not receiving what the doctor prescribed. [Yahoo! News](#)

Mobile device use while driving — United States and seven European countries, 2011

15 March - Road traffic crashes are a global public health problem, contributing to an estimated 1.3 million deaths annually (1). Known risk factors for road traffic crashes and related injuries and deaths include speed, alcohol, nonuse of restraints, and nonuse of helmets. More recently, driver distraction has become an emerging concern (2). To assess the prevalence of mobile device use while driving in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States, CDC analyzed data from the 2011 EuroPNStyles and HealthStyles surveys. Prevalence estimates for self-reported talking on a cell phone while driving and reading or sending text or e-mail

messages while driving were calculated. This report describes the results of that analysis, which indicated that, among drivers ages 18–64 years, the prevalence of talking on a cell phone while driving at least once in the past 30 days ranged from 21% in the UK to 69% in the United States, and the prevalence of drivers who had read or sent text or e-mail messages while driving at least once in the past 30 days ranged from 15% in Spain to 31% in Portugal and the United States. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

Mummies from different times, places shared key heart risk

10 March - CT scans of 137 mummies spanning four geographies and 4,000 years of history show that hardening of the arteries was commonplace, especially in older individuals, suggesting this key sign of heart disease may be a part of aging rather than the byproduct of eating too many Big Macs. The findings, presented on Sunday at the American College of Cardiology meeting in San Francisco and published in the *Lancet* medical journal, challenge the commonly held belief that atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries - the disease that causes heart attacks and strokes - is a modern plague brought on by smoking, obesity and sedentary lifestyles [Reuters](#)

Novel coronavirus infection - update

12 March - The Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia has informed WHO of a new confirmed case of infection with the novel coronavirus (nCoV). The patient, a 39-year-old male, developed symptoms on 24 February 2013. He was hospitalized on 28 February 2013 and died on 2 March 2013. Preliminary investigation indicated that the patient had no contact with previously reported cases of nCoV infection. Other potential exposures are under investigation. To date, WHO has been informed of a global total of 15 confirmed cases of human infection with nCoV, including nine deaths. [WHO](#)

The shelf life of donor blood

11 March - How long should blood be stored? For decades, the Food and Drug Administration has limited storage of refrigerated red blood cells to 42 days. But it has been clear for some time that stored blood degrades in various ways long before that six-week limit, and some research suggests that the changes may be harmful to patients who receive older blood. Now a study published in the journal *Anesthesia & Analgesia* has found that after even 21 days, the membranes of stored blood cells have stiffened, apparently the result of damage over time. That's a problem because red blood cells are about the same diameter as small capillaries, and they have to change shape to get through. [New York Times](#)

Whooping cough vaccine protection wanes as kids age

11 March - Protection against whooping cough starts to weaken a few years after preschool children get their final shot, according to a U.S. study, meaning that some children may be at risk of developing the disease before they can get a booster shot. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a booster shot at age 11 or 12. The

usual practice is to give five doses of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTaP) shots, the last at age four to six... Meissner and other researchers think that trend results from a change in the 1990s to a new type of pertussis vaccine, called an acellular vaccine, which comes with fewer side effects than the original whole-cell version. But researchers also said that switching back to the whole-cell version, at least for the first couple of shots, could improve protection as children get older... The CDC could also move up the booster shot to ages eight to 10, but it's harder to get children into the office at that point. [Reuters](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

- In Week 9 (through 02 March 2013), ILI and Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) incidence rates continued to decrease in all regions. Percents continued to be above previous season for all populations except Service members in the US and PACOM.
- Across the overseas DoD laboratory surveillance network, influenza activity varied from low to moderate levels except in Europe, where high levels of influenza activity were detected with co-circulation of influenza A/H1, A/H3, and B.
- Current influenza vaccine coverage data unavailable for this report, previously reported at 97%. [AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 9 (February 24 – March 2, 2013), influenza activity remained elevated in the United States, but decreased in most areas.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 6,259 specimens tested and reported by collaborating laboratories, 1,074 (17.2%) were positive for influenza.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was above the epidemic threshold.
- Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths: Six pediatric deaths were reported.
- Influenza-Associated Hospitalizations: A cumulative rate for the season of 38.5 laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations per 100,000 population was reported. Of reported hospitalizations, over 51% were among adults 65 years and older.
- Outpatient Illness Surveillance: The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 2.3%. This is above the national baseline of 2.2%. Seven of 10 regions reported ILI at or above region-specific baseline levels. Four states experienced moderate activity; 13 states and New York City experienced low activity; 33 states experienced minimal activity, and the District of Columbia had insufficient data.

- Geographic Spread of Influenza: Nine states reported widespread influenza activity; Puerto Rico and 24 states reported regional influenza activity; the District of Columbia and 13 states reported local influenza activity; 4 states reported sporadic influenza activity; Guam reported no influenza activity, and the U.S. Virgin Islands did not report. [FluView](#)

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During Week 9, 77 specimens were tested from 26 locations. There were 14 influenza A viruses (13 A(H3N2) and one A(H1N1)pdm09); and seven influenza B viruses detected (see Table 1).
- To date this influenza season, 3,011 specimens have been tested from 81 locations of which 984 were positive for influenza A (880 A(H3N2), 93 A(H1N1)pdm09, three co-infections of A(H3N2) & B, one co-infection of A(H3N2) & A(H1N1)pdm09, one co-infection of A(H3N2) & parainfluenza, and six A/not subtyped); and 225 were positive for influenza B (14 B/Yamagata, two B/Victoria, and 209 B/lineage undetermined). There have been 200 other respiratory viruses isolated (45 adenovirus, 68 parainfluenza, nine enterovirus, and 78 RSV).
- On 27 February 2013, the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee... agreed to retain the Influenza A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus, replace the Influenza A/Victoria/361/2011 (H3N2)-like virus with a virus that is antigenically like the cell-propagated prototype virus A/Victoria/361/2011, and to replace the influenza B/Wisconsin/1/2010-like virus with an influenza B/Massachusetts/2/2012-like virus (B/Yamagata lineage). The quadrivalent vaccine will include Influenza B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus (B/Victoria lineage). The WHO convened, in Geneva, a week prior to VRBPAC and recommended the same viruses for inclusion into the 2013-2014 vaccine. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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

- In week 9/2013, 19 of 27 countries reporting indicated concomitantly high/medium-intensity transmission and wide geographic spread. Only two countries reported increasing trends in influenza-like illness compared to six in week 8 and 11 in week 7. Of the 18 countries that reported decreasing trends, five did so for the first time since the beginning of influenza transmission this season.
- The proportion of influenza-positive cases among sentinel specimens remained high (54%), but has continued to decrease since the peak observed in week 5/2013 (61%).
- Since week 40/2012, a broadly even distribution of influenza virus types has been observed among sentinel samples, with approximately 50% each for type A and type B viruses.
- A total of 154 hospitalised laboratory-confirmed influenza cases were reported by eight countries (Belgium, France, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain).

In week 9/2013, influenza activity remained substantial across Europe but an increasing number of countries reported indications of declining transmission. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Google.org: Flu Trends

13 March – Estimates of flu activity based on certain Internet search queries indicate that the level of flu activity in the northern hemisphere ranges from low in Bulgaria, France, Poland, and Canada to high in Japan, Ukraine, Russia, Sweden, Austria, and the United States and in the southern hemisphere ranges from minimal to low in Chile and New Zealand. [Google.org Flu Trends](#)

Influenza virus aerosols in human exhaled breath: Particle size, culturability, and effect of surgical masks

7 March - ...The relative importance of direct and indirect contact, large droplet spray, and aerosols as modes of influenza transmission is not known but is important in devising effective interventions. Surgical facemasks worn by patients are recommended by the CDC as a means of reducing the spread of influenza in healthcare facilities... We found that total viral copies detected by molecular methods were 8.8 times more numerous in fine ($\leq 5 \mu\text{m}$) than in coarse ($> 5 \mu\text{m}$) aerosol particles and that the fine particles from cases with the highest total number of viral RNA copies contained infectious virus. Surgical masks reduced the overall number of RNA copies by 3.4 fold. These results suggest an important role for aerosols in transmission of influenza virus and that surgical facemasks worn by infected persons are potentially an effective means of limiting the spread of influenza. [PLOS](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 2 March 2013:

- Influenza: Among US military basic trainees, 12 cases of influenza (A/H3), 3 cases of A/H1N1, and 8 cases of influenza B were confirmed by the NHRC laboratory. There was an increase in influenza activity at basic training centers from mid-January into February and an increase in influenza A/H1N1(09) and B types in February
- Adenovirus: Type 14 adenovirus cases continue at MCRD Parris Island, though FRI rates remain low.
- 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 2 March 2013 (Week 9), Army Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) activity was slightly higher than the same time last season. For the first time this influenza season, influenza B predominated in typed specimens in both the Army and the civilian populations.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 9 were 3% higher than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Two hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in week 9. 80 hospitalized cases have been reported during this influenza season, 71 in dependents and 9 in Active Duty.
- Acute Respiratory Disease at BCT sites: ARD rates remain low; one location did not report. Surveillance testing in previous weeks detected some influenza, mostly influenza A viruses.
- Viral specimens: During week 9, 337 of 1330 (25%) laboratory specimens tested were positive for respiratory pathogens. Influenza B accounted for 39% of positive specimens. Most of the influenza positive specimens were from ERMIC (40%); 20% were from PRMC, and 17% from WRMC. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

NIH study sheds light on role of climate in influenza transmission

8 March - Two types of environmental conditions -- cold-dry and humid-rainy -- are associated with seasonal influenza epidemics, according to an epidemiological study led by researchers at the National Institutes of Health's Fogarty International Center. The paper, published in PLoS Pathogens, presents a simple climate-based model that maps influenza activity globally and accounts for the diverse range of seasonal patterns observed across temperate, subtropical and tropical regions. The findings could be used to improve existing current influenza transmission models, and could help target surveillance efforts and optimize the timing of seasonal vaccine delivery, according to Fogarty researcher Cecile Viboud, Ph.D., who headed the study. [NIH](#)

Study finds small risk of Guillain-Barre Syndrome from H1N1 vaccine



13 March - The link between the H1N1 vaccine and Guillain-Barré first emerged in 1976, during the U.S.'s last urgent national campaign to immunize citizens against a fast-acting flu... H1N1 immunization was called for again in 2009, however, when threat of a related pandemic strain of influenza against which most of the population wasn't immunized, called for a massive vaccination campaign to avoid a pandemic. Now the latest study on adverse events reported from those vaccinations, published in the Lancet, shows that the risk of Guillain-Barré remained... Researchers from the National Vaccine Program Office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services analyzed the data from 23 million people who were vaccinated as part of

that effort and found 61 million cases of H1N1, 274,000 hospitalizations and 12,470 deaths related to the pandemic flu. Of those who were immunized, 77 developed Guillain-Barré, some as long as 91 days after getting their shot. Since the disorder normally affects about one person in 100,000, this results in an additional 1.6 cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome per one million people vaccinated — still a small risk. [Time](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

China: Thousands of dead pigs found in river flowing into Shanghai

11 March - More than 3,300 dead pigs have been found in a major river that flows through Shanghai, igniting fears among city residents of contaminated tap water, according to official reports on Tuesday. Officials were trying to determine who had dumped the carcasses into the river, the Huangpu, which slices through the heart of Shanghai. Some reports blamed farmers. Officials were seeking to track the source of the pigs from marks on their ears, and a preliminary inquiry found that the dumping occurred in Zhejiang Province, which is south of Shanghai and upstream on the Huangpu... [T]he first carcasses were discovered Thursday near a water treatment plant in an area that is a protected water resource. Their numbers increased quickly over the weekend, and the tally was expected to grow further as search barges returned to Shanghai. [Reuters](#)

Pet frogs linked to salmonella outbreak in kids: CDC

11 March- Small water frogs marketed and sold as pets are linked to an outbreak of Salmonella infections from 2008 to 2011, according to a report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The report published in Pediatrics on Monday found the infection sickened 376 people in 44 U.S. states and sent 29 percent of those infected to the hospital - mostly children. "This was the first Salmonella outbreak associated with aquatic frogs, and in this case the frogs are often marketed as good pets for kids," said Shauna Mettee Zarecki, the study's lead author from the CDC in Atlanta. [Reuters](#)

Ukraine denies 'killer' military dolphins escaped



12 March - The Ukrainian Defense Ministry has described reports that three military dolphins escaped as a "fabrication" and a "gross provocation." The website "Sobytiye Kryma" (Events of the Crimea) and Russia's RIA-Novosti were among several websites and media outlets reporting on March 11 that three dolphins at the Sevastopol Aquarium that were part of a Ukrainian military program escaped during a training exercise in the Black

Sea on February 24. At least one of the reports suggested the dolphins were armed. Some quoted experts saying the animals swam off in search of mates... Without confirming the existence of a military dolphin program, the press center for Ukraine's Defense Ministry said the information in the media reports "does not agree with reality." [Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty](#)

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WELLNESS

Aspirin may lower melanoma risk

11 March - A new study has found that women who take aspirin have a reduced risk of developing melanoma—and that the longer they take it, the lower the risk. The findings suggest that aspirin's anti-inflammatory effects may help protect against this type of skin cancer... In the Women's Health Initiative, researchers observed US women aged 50 to 79 years for an average of 12 years and noted which individuals developed cancer... Overall, women who used aspirin had a 21 percent lower risk of melanoma relative to non-users. Each incremental increase in duration of aspirin use (less than one year of use, one to four years of use, and five or more years of use) was associated with an 11 percent lower risk of melanoma. [EurekAlert!](#)

Azithromycin poses fatal cardiac risk, FDA warns

12 March - The popular antibiotic azithromycin (*Zithromax* and *Zmax*, Pfizer) poses the risk for a potentially fatal irregular heart rhythm, which therefore warrants careful screening of patients for this drug, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced today. The macrolide-class antibiotic can cause abnormal changes in the electrical activity of the heart that may prolong the QT interval and trigger a rare, associated arrhythmia called torsades de pointes. The FDA stated that patients at risk for this azithromycin-induced arrhythmia include those who already have a prolonged QT interval, low blood levels of potassium or magnesium, and an abnormally slow heart rate, or who take drugs to treat arrhythmias. Elderly patients and patients with cardiac disease also may be more susceptible to the arrhythmogenic effects of the antibiotic. [Medscape](#)

Benefits of quitting smoking outpace risk of modest weight gain

13 March - The improvement in cardiovascular health that results from quitting smoking far outweighs the limited risks to cardiovascular health from the modest amount of weight gained after quitting, reports a National Institutes of Health-funded community study. The study found that former smokers without diabetes had about half as much risk of developing cardiovascular disease as current smokers, and this risk level did not change when post-cessation weight gain was accounted for in the analysis. This study is the first

epidemiological effort to directly address the health impact of the weight gain that many people experience following smoking cessation. [NIH](#)

Chronic insomnia affects heart

11 March - Insomnia may be linked to an increased risk of heart failure, according to a large new study, and the more insomnia symptoms, the greater the risk. The study, published last week in *The European Heart Journal*, used questionnaires to gather data on difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep, and waking unrefreshed among more than 54,000 Norwegian adults in a population-wide health survey. All were free of heart disease at the start of the study; there were 1,412 cases of heart failure over an average of 11 years of follow-up. After controlling for numerous health, behavioral and demographic factors, the researchers found that having one symptom of insomnia was associated with a 17 percent increase in the risk of developing heart failure. Having two symptoms increased the chances by 92 percent, and having all three nearly tripled the risk. [New York Times](#)

Self-tracking apps to help you 'quantify' yourself

12 March - Technology has made it easier than ever to track your activity levels, your sleep cycles, how you spend your time, and more. The self-trackers who near-obsessively capture and analyze their own data are part of a growing "[Quantified Self](#)" movement. Interested in giving self-tracking a try? Self-tracker Peter Zandan, an executive at Hill+Knowlton Strategies who [headed up a panel](#) on Quantified Self this year at South by Southwest, helped us curate this list of apps and devices to get more data feedback from your daily life. If you're just getting started, the most "mainstream" self-tracking devices are the Fitbit, Jawbone UP, and Nike Fuelband. Apple's getting in on this wristband-tracking market with its iWatch, which is [expected to come out](#) at the end of this year. For heart rate monitoring devices, Garmin and Polar both make options that self-trackers like. Food monitoring apps include MyFitnessPal and MyPlate. "[These are] great for folks who want to do more than count calories," Zandan said. [NPR](#)

Sleep less, eat more, gain weight

11 March - Tired? Surely those cookies will help. And a burger. Chips. And a cupcake. Yeah, soda, too. People do eat more when they're short of sleep. And that impulse to snarf when sleepy can cause quick weight gain, according to a new study. Since Americans are chronically sleep deprived, it's no wonder that our waistlines have been expanding. One-third of American workers say they're sleeping six or fewer hours a night, compared with the seven to nine hours recommended. In the experiment, people who were allowed to sleep just five hours a night ate more than when they got nine hours of shuteye. In five days of shortened sleep, they gained almost 2 pounds. [NPR](#)

Walgreen sued over Vitamin E supplement claims

11 March - Walgreen Co has been sued by a California woman who accused the largest U.S. drugstore chain of deceiving customers into believing its Vitamin E dietary supplement contributes to cardiovascular health. The complaint, filed on Friday in federal court in

Chicago, challenges a label on Walgreen's Vitamin E 400 IU Dietary Supplement that says the product "naturally contributes to cardiovascular health by helping to protect LDL cholesterol from oxidation which may cause cellular damage." Andrea Trujillo, the plaintiff, said the representation was false and misleading because clinical studies show that Vitamin E does not work as the retailer advertised. [Reuters](#)

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USAFRICOM

In Africa, corruption dirties the water

14 March - Collusion among government officials, unscrupulous water vendors and large farm owners results in diverted water supply lines, misappropriated funds, and failure to implement laws on protecting water sources from encroachment and pollution. These are just some of the ways corruption is denying millions of poor people in Africa access to safe and clean drinking water, experts say. "The impact of corruption on the water sector is manifested by lack of sustainable delivery, inequitable investment and targeting of resources, and limited participation of affected communities in developmental processes," Bethlehem Mengistu, regional advocacy manager at the NGO Water Aid, told IRIN. [IRIN](#)

Kenya's waste management challenge



13 March - As the urban population in Nairobi and elsewhere in East Africa grows, so does the solid waste management burden - a situation worsened by poor funding for urban sanitation departments and a lack of enforcement of sanitation regulations. At least 100 million people in East Africa lack access to improved sanitation, according to UN sources. "Due to budgetary deficiencies, town authorities find it difficult to address solid waste management in a sustainable manner. In addition, insufficient public awareness and enforcement of legislation is also a hindrance," Andre Dzikus, coordinator of the urban basic services section of the UN Human Settlement Programme (UN-HABITAT), told IRIN. In Nairobi, a large percentage of solid waste is managed by the private sector and NGOs due to public-private partnerships, says Dzikus. The city council's solid waste department, like those in Kampala and Dar es Salaam, is not well equipped, with transport vehicles few and often poorly serviced, despite increasing waste quantities due to rapid urbanization, he added. [IRIN](#)

Niger: 17 killed in measles outbreak

14 March - A total of 17 people have been confirmed dead due to measles outbreak in central Nigeria's Niger State, a health official said on Tuesday. State Commissioner for Health Ibrahim Sule confirmed the figure to reporters in Minna, the state capital, saying about 620 cases of the outbreak had been recorded in the state since January. [News 24](#)

Nigeria: Vaccine suspicion aggravates measles outbreak

13 March - An ongoing measles outbreak, which killed 36 children and infected over 4,000 in northern Nigeria between 16 February and 9 March, has been linked to a drop-off in immunizations due to vaccine shortages in regional health clinics and widespread suspicion of the vaccine, say government health officials. Many parents have declined to vaccinate their children against measles as they believe the vaccine is harmful, according to Ado Mohammed, director-general of Nigeria's National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA). "Parents are largely to blame... for their refusal to have their children immunized against preventable diseases including measles due to unfounded suspicion that such vaccines are harmful to children, following persistent rumours that polio vaccine causes infertility in children," he told IRIN. [IRIN](#)

South Sudan's gender gap still too wide

8 March - Years after the end of South Sudan's war with Sudan, the country's women still find themselves on the front line - this time, battling abuse, child marriage, and a dowry system that commodifies them from birth. According to an assessment of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Sudan, released by the Conflict and Health Journal on 6 March, 68 percent of females and 63 percent of males - out of a sample of 680 respondents - agreed that "there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten". "You can't speak to people about going to the police if they don't even think it's wrong," said Paleki Matthew, who runs the NGO South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network. [IRIN](#)

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USCENTCOM

Afghanistan: Taliban stopping polio vaccinations, says Afghan governor



12 March - The Taliban have halted an annual polio vaccination campaign in a remote part of Afghanistan, according to a senior official, raising concerns that opposition to the critical immunisation drive could be spilling across from insurgent groups in neighbouring Pakistan. The Taliban have controlled parts of poor, isolated and mountainous Nuristan province for several years, but they have never before prevented medical workers reaching children in their strongholds, said the governor Tamim Nuristani. "For the past three years Waygal district has been under the Taliban, they are very strong there. For the last two years the vaccine process went on in the district, but this year they stopped it," he told the Guardian by phone from the provincial capital, an island of government control in the restive area. [Guardian](#)

Pakistan: Fight against polio - tribesmen fined by militants for vaccinating their children

9 March - Salman Afridi*, a resident of Bachi Nehar in Sipah, Bara, said around 20 families in Speen Qabar and Bachi Nehar, Sipah vaccinated their children against polio. After the vaccination team left the area on Thursday evening, militants of banned outfit Lashkar-e-Islam (LI) arrived in four vehicles and surrounded the area, said Salman. They then took parents of the immunised children to a ground and trussed them up, he added. According to Salman, a local LI commander, identified as Nazar had warned the tribesmen not to vaccinate their children. Approximately 20 people were tied by Nazar, who demanded Rs20,000 be paid for their release. Shahbaz Khan Afridi* from Speen Qabar, Sipah said those who paid the fine were released with a warning to refrain from further immunisation, which was deemed "a conspiracy against Islam by infidels"... Residents of Sipah have decided to boycott future anti-polio campaigns. [Express Tribune](#)

U.N.: Number of Syrian refugees escalating at rapid rate

10 March - The number of Syrian refugees could double -- if not triple -- by the end of the year if the crisis continues without change, a U.N. official said Sunday. Since the civil war began two years ago, more than 1 million have fled the country. The number of refugees recorded has gone from 3,000 on average each day in December to 8,000 daily in February, Antonio Guterres, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees, said Sunday in Ankara, Turkey. "Now if this escalation goes on -- and nothing happens to solve the problem -- we might have in the end of the year a much larger number of refugees, two or three times ... the present level." In December, the U.N.'s Regional Response Plan for Syrian Refugees estimated that 1.1 million displaced Syrians would move to surrounding countries by the end of June. The group now predicts that figure will be exceeded this month. Most flee to surrounding countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, but they are increasingly going to North Africa and Europe, according to the U.N. [CNN](#)

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USEUCOM

Europeans are world's biggest smokers and drinkers: WHO

12 March- Europeans are the world's biggest smokers and drinkers, according to a World Health Organization report that says higher prices on cigarettes and alcohol in the region may help curb the death and disease they cause. On average, 27 percent of people over 15 smoke across the 53 nations that make up the WHO's European region, higher than in any other part of the world, the Geneva-based agency said today in its triennial health report on the continent, home to 900 million people. Europeans also consume an average of 10.6 liters of alcohol a year, more than in any other region, according to the report. [Bloomberg](#)

U.K.: Thirty eight hospitalised as measles cases in Swansea outbreak reaches 252

14 March – Health chiefs in Wales are urging parents to make sure their children receive the MMR vaccination as cases in the Swansea area outbreak reach 252, with 43 new cases reported in the past week alone. A total of 38 people - one in six who have contracted measles in this outbreak - have been hospitalised... The majority of the new cases are in the Swansea area but cases are being reported across South East Wales. [This is South Wales](#)

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USNORTHCOM

Royal Caribbean cruise ship hit by virus; 108 sick

8 March - Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd said on Friday that 108 people fell sick with a gastrointestinal illness believed to be a norovirus on its Vision of the Seas ship, which docked in Port Everglades, Florida, at the end of an 11-day trip. The outbreak was the latest black eye for the cruise industry, trying to regain its sea legs after several high-profile mishaps. Royal Caribbean said those sickened had responded well to the over-the-counter medicine they were given. It said 105 of 1,991 passengers and 3 of 772 crew members aboard fell ill. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Dengue fever no longer just a visitor to Florida Keys

13 March - ... After a 60-year hiatus, the mosquito-borne illness dengue fever has now officially re-established itself [in the Florida Keys.] People infected during a recent outbreak in Florida didn't catch the virus abroad but rather got a strain that's unique to Key West, virologists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report Wednesday in the journal Emerging Infectious Disease. The virus has been circulating around the Key West population for at least two years, the researchers say, and it has evolved its own genetic fingerprint, distinct from dengue in Central America and the Caribbean... Dengue fever was endemic in the U.S. before World War II, until the U.S. Army led aggressive mosquito-eradication campaigns to stop malaria among troops. Their efforts wiped out malaria in the U.S. and took dengue along with it. But in the past decade or so, the virus and its primary transmitter, the Aedes aegypti mosquito, have been slowly making their way back into Florida. [NPR](#)

U.S.: Fatal Md. rabies case is first in state since 1976

12 March - Maryland health officials said Tuesday that an adult resident has died of rabies, the state's first case of human rabies in nearly four decades. Health officials said they did not know how the person was exposed to the rabies virus. To protect the privacy of the family, they provided no additional information about the individual or location of death. In

a statement, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene said doctors and public health officials are assessing the risk of rabies exposure in people who had direct contact with the individual. When people are exposed to rabies, it is usually because of a bite from an infected animal, not from contact with another person. The last case of human rabies was in 1976, the statement said. [Washington Post](#)

U.S.: Judge blocks New York City large-soda ban, Mayor Bloomberg vows fight

12 March - New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg vowed on Monday to appeal a judge's ruling that struck down his pioneering ban on large sugary drinks sold by the city's restaurants, movie theaters and other food service businesses just a day before it was to take effect. The judge called the ban "arbitrary and capricious" in an 11th-hour decision that dealt a serious blow to Bloomberg, who has made public health a cornerstone of his administration, with laws prohibiting smoking in restaurants, bars and parks; banning trans fats; and requiring chain restaurants to post calorie counts. [Reuters](#)

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USPACOM

Bangladesh: Nipah Infection in 2013

12 March - **Situation Update:** 19 Nipah cases were identified. Among them 17 died (mortality rate 89%). These cases are from 13 districts (Gaibandha, Natore, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Rajbari, Pabna, Jhenaidah, Mymensingh, Nilphamari, Chittagong, Kurigram, Kustia). Age distribution of cases are 8 months to 55 years among them 13 are male and 6 are female.

Transmission: 1. Drinking of raw date palm sap (kancha khejurer rosh) contaminated with NiV; 2. Close physical contact with Nipah infected patients [Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research](#)

Papua New Guinea grapples with ageing health workforce

14 March - Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a Pacific country rich in natural resources, yet its health staffing levels are comparable to the world's poorest countries due to a rapidly retiring force and lack of qualified replacements... Despite repeated warnings of the shortage, first at a 2002 national health conference, again in 2008 during a government health resources forum, and most recently by a 2011 World Bank report, the country still faces what the government calls a "drastic" health worker shortage. The World Bank report predicted a large decline in the "backbone of rural service delivery" (nurses and midwives) - by up to half. [IRIN](#)

Thailand struggles to curb high teen pregnancy rate

7 March - ... Thailand's teenage pregnancy rate is the highest in Southeast Asia after neighboring Laos, according to the Bureau of Reproductive Health at the Thai Public Health Ministry. In fact, even though the overall birthrate is dropping, teen births are on the rise. Out of every 1,000 live births, 54 are from teen mothers aged 15-19 - higher than in the United States and ten times higher than Singapore's teen pregnancy rate. What's more, it's rising fast. The number of live births by Thai teenage mothers aged 15-18 increased 43 percent between 2000 and 2011, a Thai annual public health report shows. Though there are many factors responsible, health experts put weight on cultural mores that make frank discussion of the issue difficult, whether in an official context or a personal one. [Reuters](#)

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USSOUTHCOM

Haiti recycles human waste in fight against cholera epidemic

10 March - It's a modern-day alchemy that is, on a small scale at least, helping Haitians turn something deadly into something valuable... Every week, Soil (Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods) collects the human waste from 56 dry toilets built in camps for displaced earthquake victims, and mixes it with chips of sugar cane bagasse, a byproduct of local rum production... The Haitian government recently built several sewage treatment plants that process traditional pit latrine waste in open-air stabilisation ponds. It and sewage treatment companies such as Jedco are experimenting with the alchemy of transforming a potentially deadly substance into a rich and much-needed fertiliser.

[Guardian](#)

South Americans face upheaval in deadly water battles

13 February- The injured and dead in Celendin, 800 kilometers (500 miles) north of Lima, are victims in a continent-wide conflict that pits South American governments and big, often foreign- based companies against people who stand to lose their homes as water is diverted to industrial uses. Leaders across the region, elected on promises to fuel economic growth and lift their populations out of poverty, are fast tracking water-use approvals for projects like the Conga mine... South America has more water than any other region on earth, with 29 percent of the world's reserves, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The rub is that the water isn't always where the best mineral or agricultural resources are located. [Bloomberg](#)

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