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Childhood vaccination rates may be lower for military kids

13 April - Children with parents in the military may have lower vaccination rates than other kids, according to a large U.S. survey. Even with socioeconomic factors taken into account, parents’ memories and doctors’ records suggested that more military children under age three weren’t up-to-date on their childhood vaccinations: 28 percent, compared with about 21 percent of other kids, researchers reported in Pediatrics. “Military children did not have documentation of full vaccination status as frequently as non-military,” Dr. Angela Dunn, an epidemiologist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said by email. “We don’t know if it’s the result of the information that providers had access to or the actual vaccination status.” Reuters

Military medical leaders sound alarm over spending cuts

15 April - Looming spending cuts pose a significant threat to military medical research and could harm health services for troops, families and retirees, top Army, Navy and Air Force medical commanders told Congress. Testifying before the House Appropriations Committee’s defense panel Tuesday, the military services’ surgeons general said proposed budget caps would have a “detrimental impact” on the Defense Department health system and urged lawmakers to fix the issues before the cuts go into effect. Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho said the Army Medical Command would be forced to close some inpatient and acute care surgical centers if budget caps remain in place. Military Times


March 2015 - The incidence rate of heat stroke among active component service members in 2014 was slightly higher than in 2013 but similar to the rates in 2011 and 2012. Incidence rates of heat stroke were higher among males, those younger than 20 years of age, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Marine Corps and Army members, and service members in combat-specific occupations, compared to their respective counterparts. Fewer service members were treated for “other heat injuries” in 2014 (n=1,683) than in any other year of the 5-year surveillance period. In addition, there were fewer reportable medical events for “other heat injuries” in 2014 than in any of the prior 4 years. The incidence rate of “other heat injuries” was higher among females than males and was more than 6-fold higher among recruit trainees than among other enlisted members or officers. During 2010–2014, 851 diagnoses of heat injuries were documented as having occurred among service members serving in Iraq/Afghanistan; 7.1% (n=60) of those diagnoses were for heat stroke. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

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GLOBAL

Cold packs on extremities aid in heat stroke
13 April - Symptoms of heat stroke may be eased by applying cold packs to the cheeks, hands and feet, a study suggests, potentially offering a new way to help lower body temperatures in overheated athletes. "The cheeks, palms, and soles of the feet are special areas," with blood vessels that don’t contract when cold packs are applied, helping to remove heat from the skin surface and cool body temperatures, said study co-author Dr. Grant Lipman, a researcher in emergency medicine at Stanford University in California. … [The] findings suggest that the new method could be used to help cool down overheated athletes, particularly as a treatment started in the field and continued by paramedics on the way to the hospital, Lipman said by email. MedPage Today

Rabies kills 59,000 people annually
16 April - Canine rabies kills tens of thousands of people every year and costs economies billions of dollars. A new global study said understanding the true burden of the disease may result in more resources to prevent it. Dr. Louise Taylor said while the tools exist to prevent deaths from rabies, they’re not being used in many countries hardest hit by the disease. “At the moment, our best estimate from this recent study is that about 59,000 people across the world are dying of rabies every year. And that’s just the burden from canine rabies transmitted by dogs.” … Rabies is spread mostly by dogs, even though it exists in many bats. Men and boys generally receive more bites from infected dogs than women and girls. VOA

Review: Invasive Salmonella causes 3.4 million global cases a year
13 April - Each year bloodstream Salmonella infections cause an estimated 3.4 million cases and 680,000 deaths worldwide, with an especially high incidence in Africa, according to a meta-analysis published in Emerging Infectious Diseases late last week. An international team of researchers, including scientists from the CDC, analyzed data from 10 major studies that involved the global incidence of invasive nontyphoidal Salmonella infections. They estimated that 3.4 million cases occur annually (range, 2.1 million to 6.5 million) and 681,316 deaths (range, 415,164 to 1.3 million). The researchers also determined a global incidence of 49 cases per 100,000 population. That number, however, surged to 227 cases per 100,000 population in Africa. They called for a better understanding of the epidemiology of the disease. CIDRAP News Scan (fifth item)

WHO calls for disclosure of all trial results, regardless of outcomes
14 April - Noting that the results of many clinical trials never see publication, the World Health Organization (WHO) today called for disclosure of the results of all trials of medical
products, regardless of the findings. The WHO said full disclosure is necessary to ensure that decisions related to the safety and efficacy of drugs, vaccines, and other products are based on the best available evidence. ... The WHO said that a study of reporting of large clinical trials registered on clinicaltrials.gov and completed by 2009 showed that 23% had no results published. The trials included nearly 300,000 participants. Among clinical trials of vaccines against five diseases registered in a variety of databases between 2006 and 2012, only 29% had been published in a peer-reviewed journal by the WHO-recommended deadline of 24 months after study completion, the agency added. CIDRAP News Scan (second item)

EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

Challenges in Guinea spur increase in Ebola cases

15 April - Ebola progress held steady in Sierra Leone and Liberia last week, but the number of confirmed cases in Guinea increased, with the country's response indicators showing a mixed picture amid sparks of community resistance, the World Health Organization (WHO) said today in its weekly epidemiologic update. The outbreak region registered 37 confirmed cases last week, up from 30 reported the week before, the WHO said. Guinea's cases increased from 21 to 28, with Sierra Leone reporting 9 lab-confirmed cases, the same as the week before. Liberia hasn't reported any new cases since the middle of March. Meanwhile, the geographic scope of the outbreak shrank a bit last week, with 8 districts in Guinea and Sierra Leone reporting cases, down from 10 the week before. The hot spots are still located in western Guinea, especially Forecariah district near the border with Sierra Leone. The few cases in Sierra Leone are coming mainly from three western districts in an area that includes the capital city, Freetown. CIDRAP

Ebola survivors 'safe sex warning' issued by WHO

15 April - The WHO has urged Ebola survivors to be even more cautious during sexual contact to ensure the virus is not passed on to their partners. The warning comes after a survivor was found to have traces of Ebola in his semen almost six months after recovery. This is some 90 days later than previously documented. It is unclear whether Ebola can still be spread at this point. But officials have launched further investigations to evaluate the risks. ... The new advice says: "For greater security and prevention of other sexually transmitted infections, Ebola survivors should consider correct and consistent use of condoms for all sexual acts beyond three months until more information is available." BBC News
Empty Ebola clinics in Liberia are seen as misstep in U.S. relief effort

11 April - ... President Obama ordered the largest American intervention ever in a global health crisis, hoping to stem the deadliest Ebola epidemic in history. But after spending hundreds of millions of dollars and deploying nearly 3,000 troops to build Ebola treatment centers, the United States ended up creating facilities that have largely sat empty: Only 28 Ebola patients have been treated at the 11 treatment units built by the United States military, American officials now say. ... The emphasis on constructing treatment centers — so widely championed last year — ended up having much less impact than the inexpensive, nimble measures taken by residents to halt the outbreak, many officials say. ... The United States has spent $1.4 billion on its Ebola mission in West Africa, with most of it going to Liberia. Deploying the military cost $360 million, not including the construction, staffing and operating expenses at the treatment centers it built. As the world’s biggest donor to the Ebola campaign, the United States also supported a wide range of important efforts, like building a new cemetery and increasing body-collection teams. But the vast majority of aid, about 90 percent, came after Ebola cases in Liberia had already begun to drop. New York Times

Guinea finds nine new Ebola cases near border with Sierra Leone

16 April - Guinean authorities have confirmed at least nine new cases of Ebola in the southwest region of Forecariah near the border with Sierra Leone, the area hardest hit by the year-old outbreak, a senior health official said on Thursday. Authorities launched a four day, door-to-door campaign in Forecariah on April 12 to improve community participation in reporting suspected cases and as part of an emergency 45-day drive to tackle Ebola in the west of the country. ... [Sakoba] Keita said that community’s reluctance to curb traditional burial practices, which involve touching the dead, was the principal reason for the continued spread of the infectious virus. Reuters

Pattern of safety lapses where group worked to battle Ebola outbreak

12 April - Partners in Health, a Boston-based charity dedicated to improving health care for people in poor countries, signed on to the Ebola fight last fall with high ambitions. Unlike Doctors Without Borders and other relief agencies that specialize in acute response to crises, Partners in Health pledged to support the deeply inadequate health systems in Sierra Leone and Liberia for the long haul. ... But the medical group, which had never responded to an Ebola outbreak before and had rarely worked in emergencies, encountered serious challenges. Now, a previously undisclosed inquiry by international health officials and
interviews with employees and managers of the aid group describe a pattern of safety lapses at a government-run treatment center in Port Loko, Sierra Leone, where Partners in Health worked. The safety deficiencies, which included inadequate protective clothing, inconsistent protocols in using it and inappropriate disposal of contaminated waste products, led to the closing of the center in mid-March after an American and a Sierra Leonean clinician developed Ebola, and many of the aid group’s staff members were evacuated. New York Times

Schools reopen in Sierra Leone as Ebola threat recedes

14 April - Schools have reopened across Sierra Leone nine months after they were closed because of the Ebola outbreak. The government hopes that the studying time lost by the country's 1.8 million children can still be made up. The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) says that the reopening of Sierra Leone's schools marks "a major step in the normalisation of life". New cases of Ebola continue to be reported in Sierra Leone but numbers are declining. BBC News

INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 13:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity continues to decrease overall but remained high in 4 states.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity seemed to have peaked in many countries and continues to decline.
- PACOM: Moderate influenza activity was seen in Hawaii and there was minimal activity throughout the rest of PACOM.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity was minimal.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity remains low. AFHSC DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 13 (March 29-April 4, 2015), influenza activity continued to decrease in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 10,684 specimens tested and reported by U.S. World Health
Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories during week 13, 1,138 (10.7%) 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: Two influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.
- Outpatient Illness Surveillance: The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 1.8%, which is below the national baseline of 2.0%. FluView

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

15 April - On 10 April 2015, the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) of China notified WHO of 20 additional laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A (H7N9) virus, including 4 deaths. Onset dates ranged from 14 February to 21 March 2015. Cases ranged in age from 32 to 80 years with a mean age of 55 years. Of these 20 cases, 15 (75%) were male. The majority (18 cases, 90%) reported exposure to live poultry. One case is a health care worker, who had also poultry exposure. No clusters were reported. Cases were reported from five provinces: Anhui (3), Fujian (2), Guangdong (4), Shandong (1), and Zhejiang (10). WHO

DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During Surveillance Weeks 12 & 13, 22 March – 4 April 2015, a total of 123 specimens were collected and received from 37 locations. Results were finalized for 65 specimens from 27 locations. During Week 12, the laboratory identified eight influenza A(H3N2) and 15 influenza B. During Week 13, two influenza A(H3N2) and six influenza B were identified. For Week 13, approximately 23% of specimens tested positive for influenza (17 % influenza B, 6% influenza A). Overall, we are continuing to see a downward trend in influenza activity. USAF School of Aerospace Medicine

Egypt’s avian flu surge lacks an explanation

13 April - Cases of H5N1 avian flu have been surging in Egypt since the fall. Egypt has now passed Indonesia as the country with the most human cases in total since the virus was first found in Hong Kong almost 20 years ago. About a third of the 336 cases Egypt has reported to the World Health Organization since 2006 have been fatal. H5N1 avian flu still has killed more people in Indonesia. Despite the sudden unexplained increase — Egypt has officially reported 125 cases since January — the World Health Organization said the country’s “current risk status” has not changed. Nearly all cases still appear to involve contact with poultry; the disease has long been endemic in birds throughout Egypt, where many households have small poultry flocks. New York Times
Flu News Europe

- Week 14/2015 (30 March-5 April 2015)
- Influenza activity continued to decrease in most reporting countries, although the proportion of influenza-virus-positive specimens remained high (36%). Since week 51/2014 (for 15 weeks) the positivity rate has been over the threshold of 10% indicating seasonal influenza activity.
- Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2) and type B viruses continued to circulate in the WHO European Region, but type B viruses accounted for 77% of sentinel detections for week 14/2015.
- The number of hospitalised influenza cases is returning to low levels.
- Excess all-cause mortality among people aged 65 years and above, which was concomitant with increased influenza activity and the predominance of A(H3N2) viruses and had been observed in most countries participating in the European project for monitoring excess mortality for public health action (EuroMOMO) appears to have ended. Flu News Europe

H5N2 strikes 8 more Minnesota farms, reaches Iowa

14 April - The H5N2 avian influenza virus has taken another big and unexplained jump, invading eight more Minnesota turkey farms in six counties and crossing the border to hit a turkey farm in northwestern Iowa, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today. The new Minnesota outbreaks raise the state’s total since early March to 22, with the number of affected turkeys well above 1 million. Three of the six counties cited in today’s announcement are facing their first incursion of the virus. Today’s report, combined with a USDA list of earlier outbreaks, indicates a total of 32 H5N2 outbreaks in commercial poultry in the Midwest since the beginning of March. All but one of those have involved turkeys; yesterday a chicken-farm outbreak was reported in southeastern Wisconsin. CIDRAP

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For Week 14 (through 11 April 2015):

Influenza
- Two cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza, one (A/H3) and one (B) among US military basic trainees.
- Decreasing influenza at US military sites.

FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated elevated FRI rates at MCRD San Diego and CGTC Cape May. NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update
Egg execs’ jail sentences send strong message to industry

13 April - Two former egg industry executives received jail sentences Monday for their roles in a major 2010 salmonella outbreak, representing the latest high-profile victory for government officials hoping to emphasize food safety. The three-month sentences handed down in federal court are noteworthy because only a handful of cases of corporate misconduct end with executives behind bars. The extent of harm caused by the outbreak and the pattern of problems led to the decision for jail time. [Washington Post]

FDA: Medically important drugs make up 62% of those used in food animals

13 April - Domestic sales and distribution of medically important antimicrobials approved for food-producing animals increased by 3% in 2013—to 62% of all antimicrobials used in such animals—and they increased 20% from 2009 through 2013, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said in its annual update on drug use in domestic animals. In December, the FDA announced Guidance for Industry #213, which calls for animal pharmaceutical companies to remove growth-promotion claims from medically important antimicrobial drugs in food-producing animals. At that time the FDA also implemented the Veterinary Feed Directive for ensuring that the drugs can no longer be used without veterinary oversight. Of 2013 sales of medically important antimicrobials in food animals, tetracyclines accounted for 71%, penicillins for 9%, macrolides for 6%, sulfonamides for 4%, aminoglycosides for 3%, lincosamides for 3%, and cephalosporins for less than 1%. [CIDRAP News Scan (fourth item)]

New H3N2 virus implicated in Chicago canine flu outbreak

13 April - A canine influenza outbreak affecting dogs in Chicago and other Midwest locations is being fueled by a virus closely related to Asian H3N2 strains and not H3N8 as originally thought, researchers from Cornell University and the University of Wisconsin announced yesterday. The H3N2 virus striking dogs in the Chicago region hasn't been detected before in North America, and the outbreak suggests a recent introduction of H3N2 from Asia, where it has been widely circulating in southern Chinese and South Korean dog populations since it was identified in 2006, according to a Cornell press release. According to reports last week, the virus has sickened more than 1,000 dogs, killing at least 5, in the Chicago area. The Cornell and Wisconsin team said the outbreak suggests a recent introduction of the H3N2 virus from Asia, and there is no evidence that it can be transmitted to people, though it can infect and cause respiratory illness in cats. [CIDRAP News Scan (first item)]
US offers mixed news on drug resistance in foodborne pathogens

15 April - A pair of annual federal reports on antimicrobial resistance in pathogens found in poultry and meat brought a mix of good and not-so-good news this week. The government's National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System (NARMS) issued its retail meat report for 2012 and an interim report for 2013 that covers only Salmonella. ... On the Salmonella front, testing showed that multidrug-resistant strains decreased from 2011 to 2013. In 2012, 33% of retail chicken Salmonella isolates were resistant to three or more classes of antibiotics, which was lower than in 2011. The number dropped to 26% in the 2013 interim report. There was good news on quinolone resistance: all Salmonella isolates from poultry and meat were susceptible to nalidixic acid and ciprofloxacin in 2012, and in 2013 all were susceptible to ciprofloxacin. ... The 2012 report shows that third-generation cephalosporin resistance in retail chicken Salmonella isolates increased from 10% to 28% between 2002 and 2012, but the 2013 report shows it dropped to 19.7%. As for Campylobacter, nearly half of C jejuni and C coli isolates from retail chicken were resistant to tetracycline in 2012. ... The report also said that monitoring has revealed no consistent changes in ciprofloxacin resistance among retail chicken C jejuni and C coli isolates since the FDA banned fluoroquinolone use in poultry production in 2005. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

Why the FDA has never looked at some of the additives in our food

14 April - Companies have added thousands of ingredients to foods with little to no government oversight. That's thanks to a loophole in a decades-old law that allows them to deem an additive to be “generally recognized as safe” — or GRAS — without the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's blessing, or even its knowledge. The loophole was originally intended to allow manufacturers of common ingredients like vinegar and table salt — when added to processed foods — to bypass the FDA's lengthy safety-review process. But over time, companies have found that it's far more efficient to take advantage of the exemption to get their products on shelves quickly. Some of these products contain additives that the FDA has found to pose dangers. ... Critics of the system say the biggest concern, however, is that companies regularly introduce new additives without ever informing the FDA. NPR

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American Heart Association issues advice for heart-healthy workplace

13 April - Employers who want to encourage heart-healthy behavior by employees should share seven important messages, the American Heart Association advises. The messages are highlighted in the association’s new guidelines for employers who want to promote heart health in increasingly popular “workplace wellness” programs. They are: stop smoking, get active, lose weight, eat better, manage blood pressure, control cholesterol and reduce blood sugar. Reuters

Caesarean sections should only be performed when medically necessary

10 April - Caesarean section is one of the most common surgeries in the world, with rates continuing to rise, particularly in high- and middle-income countries. Although it can save lives, caesarean section is often performed without medical need, putting women and their babies at-risk of short- and long-term health problems. A new statement from the World Health Organization (WHO) underscores the importance of focusing on the needs of the patient, on a case by case basis, and discourages the practice of aiming for “target rates”. Caesarean section may be necessary when vaginal delivery might pose a risk to the mother or baby – for example due to prolonged labour, foetal distress, or because the baby is presenting in an abnormal position. However, caesarean sections can cause significant complications, disability or death, particularly in settings that lack the facilities to conduct safe surgeries or treat potential complications. WHO

Dementia 'halted in mice brains'

15 April - Tweaking the brain's immune system with a drug has prevented mice developing dementia, a study shows. The team at Duke University, in the US, showed immune cells which start attacking nutrients in the brain may be a trigger for the disease. They say their findings could open up new avenues of research for a field that has not developed a single drug to slow the progression of the disease. Experts said the findings offered new hope of a treatment. The researchers identified microglia - normally the first line of defence against infection in the brain - as major players in the development of dementia. They found some microglia changed to become exceptionally adept at breaking down a component of protein, an amino acid called arginine, in the early stages of the disease. As arginine levels plummeted, the immune cells appeared to dampen the immune system in the brain. In mouse experiments, a chemical was used to block the enzymes that break down arginine. They showed fewer of the characteristics of dementia such as damaged proteins collecting in the brain and the animals performed better in memory tests. BBC News
Divorcees 'have more heart attacks'

15 April - Divorcees are more likely to have a heart attack than their peers who stay married, US research suggests. An analysis of 15,827 people showed women were worst affected, and barely reduced the risk if they remarried. The study, published in the journal Circulation, argued that chronic stress, linked to divorce, had a long-term impact on the body. The British Heart Foundation called for more research before divorce is classed as a major heart risk. ... During the course of the study, between 1992 and 2010, roughly one in three people divorced at least once. Women who divorced once were 24% more likely to have had a heart attack in the study than women who were continuously married. The figure was 77% for those having multiple divorces. In men, there was a modest 10% extra risk for one divorce and 30% increase after multiple divorces. BBC News

Report questions whether health apps benefit healthy people

14 April - Consumers looking to use their mobile devices to improve their health — or at least maintain their well-being — have tens of thousands of choices. But if those consumers are already healthy, the apps won’t necessarily do them any good, according to a new report in The BMJ, a British medical journal. ... An article published in The BMJ on Tuesday evening, however, questions whether such consumer health apps provide any real health value to already-healthy consumers — and whether the apps could even cause harm by stoking unneeded anxiety among the worried well. Doctors don’t yet have definitive answers to these questions, partly because smartphone apps are so new and partly because government health authorities regulate consumer health apps at their own discretion, depending on the possible risks to users. As a result, many health and fitness apps lack rigorous clinical evidence to demonstrate they can actually improve health outcomes. New York Times

Study: Civic engagement may stave off brain atrophy, improve memory

15 April - Meaningful activities experienced with others may reverse the normal brain shrinkage associated with the aging process. Instead of shrinking as expected, as part of the normal aging process, the memory center in the brains of seniors maintained their size and, in men, grew modestly after two years in a program that engaged them in meaningful and social activities. ... At the same time, those with larger increases in the brain’s volume over two years also saw the greatest improvements on memory tests, showing a direct correlation between brain volume and the reversal of a type of cognitive decline linked to increased risk for Alzheimer’s disease. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News
The right dose of exercise for a longer life

15 April - ... The current broad guidelines from governmental and health organizations call for 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week to build and maintain health and fitness. But whether that amount of exercise represents the least amount that someone should do — the minimum recommended dose — or the ideal amount has not been certain. ... [Researchers] with the National Cancer Institute, Harvard University and other institutions gathered and pooled data about people’s exercise habits from six large, ongoing health surveys, winding up with information about more than 661,000 adults, most of them middle-aged. ... They found that, unsurprisingly, the people who did not exercise at all were at the highest risk of early death. But those who exercised a little, not meeting the recommendations but doing something, lowered their risk of premature death by 20 percent. Those who met the guidelines precisely, completing 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise, enjoyed greater longevity benefits and 31 percent less risk of dying during the 14-year period compared with those who never exercised. The sweet spot for exercise benefits, however, came among those who tripled the recommended level of exercise, working out moderately, mostly by walking, for 450 minutes per week, or a little more than an hour per day. Those people were 39 percent less likely to die prematurely than people who never exercised. At that point, the benefits plateaued, the researchers found, but they never significantly declined. New York Times

When work and sleep conflict, work wins

10 April - ... [The] more money people make, the less they sleep. That’s been true for decades in the United States and in other countries as well. On average, adults earning the highest incomes — around $98,000 for a family of four — sleep 40 minutes less than people in the lowest-income families. And among short sleepers — those who are in the bottom 10 percent of nightly rest — high-income people are overrepresented, according to the government survey that sleep researchers trust most. ... In general, the factor that seems the most closely tied with how much sleep people get is how much they work. More hours of work tend to crowd out sleep. People who work two jobs sleep the least of anyone, according to a recent study, and are most likely to be in the bottom 10 percent of sleepers. New York Times

You are when you eat

13 April – A new study may help explain why glucose tolerance — the ability to regulate blood-sugar levels — is lower at dinner than at breakfast for healthy people, and why shift workers are at increased risk of diabetes. ... “Our findings suggest that the circadian system strongly affects glucose tolerance, independent from the feeding/fasting and sleep/wake cycles.” ... The team found that glucose levels after identical meals were 17 percent higher (i.e., lower glucose tolerance) in the evening than in the morning, independent of when a
participant slept or had their meals. They also found that simulated night work (sleeping during the day, having breakfast at 8 p.m., etc.), lowered glucose tolerance throughout multiple days. This phenomenon, which the researchers refer to as "circadian misalignment" may have important implications for shift workers. Harvard Gazette

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USAFRICOM

Cameroon soldiers defy Boko Haram in polio battle

13 April - How do you vaccinate women and children against polio in remote areas prone to attack from Boko Haram militants? Arm the soldiers with vaccine. This is exactly what has happened with great success in northern Cameroon. Following a series of abductions last year by Boko Haram groups, military escorts have been joining vaccination drives in Cameroon’s Far North Region to protect both local and international humanitarian workers. In addition to acting as a security presence, officers, who normally patrol the frontlines and at-risk border communities, are also trained to administer polio vaccines – a tactic UNICEF says has been key to the successful campaign. It allowed children in even the most dangerous areas to be vaccinated, as well as refugees the moment their families crossed the border. “It is our role to protect the population and prevent them from whatever danger, including health threats,” a Cameroonian commander, who wished to remain anonymous, told IRIN. “So we are simply adding more value to the work that we are already doing.” Military personnel also engaged with community leaders and radio stations to spread word of the importance of the vaccinations. IRIN

Kenya: Somali refugees feel remittance pain after Kenya attack

10 April - Hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees are among those hardest hit by Kenya’s closure of remittance firms in the wake of the 2 April shooting of at least 147 university students in Garissa by Al-Shabab militants. Thirteen such firms had their licences revoked on 7 April by the Central Bank of Kenya in a measure the government said was designed to curb the financing of terrorism. Although increasingly a regional entity, Al-Shabab is predominantly a Somali insurgency and Kenyan officials have frequently claimed that it recruits and plans operations from within refugee camps. ... The closures mean “most families won’t be able to receive money from friends and families from abroad. It will make things difficult for people who already have a very difficult life. [While] refugees do receive aid from the World Food Programme, “food aid is never enough.” IRIN
Uganda prison overcrowding poses new health risks

10 April - A report by Uganda's Commissioner of Prisons reveals that serious overcrowding and understaffing in jails have created a health threat. A backlogged judicial system along with poor funding are posing a serious threat to prisoners, staff and the community. In Uganda, incarceration rates have skyrocketed. The current prison system was meant to hold around 16,000 prisoners. However a recent report shows nearly 42,000 prisoners are serving time. Human Rights Watch says over half of those inmates are still awaiting trial. There are only five doctors in the entire prison system. This has created a number of health crises, including the rise of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. MDR-TB is an especially brutal strain that occurs when treatment of TB remains incomplete. Its mortality rate can reach as high as 80 percent. Dr. James Kisambu, the head of prison health services, says that over 50 percent of the cases of MDR-TB in Uganda come from the prison system. VOA

US, African agreement formalizes creation of African CDC

13 April - Top officials from the United States and the African Union (AU) today formalized a collaboration between the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and its African counterparts to create the African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (African CDC). US Secretary of State John Kerry and AU Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, MBChB, signed a memorandum of cooperation (MOC) in Washington, DC, during broader high-level deliberations under way this week with African officials. Tom Frieden, MD, MPH, director of the US CDC, said in a statement that West Africa’s Ebola outbreak reaffirmed the need for a public health institute to support African health ministries and other groups in preventing, detecting, and responding to disease outbreaks. ... The African CDC coordinating center will be in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and the AU will identify five regional collaborating centers for each of the five AU geographic regions. CIDRAP

Kyrgyzstan: Measles outbreak prompts travel notice

15 April - After reporting more than 11,000 measles cases during the past year, according to the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a travel notice for people headed to the Central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan. In fact, the CDC reports that cases have dramatically increased in 2015. Many people have been hospitalized, and two children have died. CDC recommends that travelers to Kyrgyzstan protect themselves by making sure they are vaccinated against measles, particularly infants 6–11 months of age (1 dose of measles vaccine) and children 12 months of age or older (2 doses of measles vaccine). Outbreak News Today
Saudi Arabia: Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

16 April - Between 2 and 12 April 2015, the National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia notified WHO of 4 additional cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection, including 2 deaths. ... The National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also notified WHO of the death of 3 previously reported MERS-CoV cases. ... Globally, WHO has been notified of 1106 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including at least 421 related deaths. WHO

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France tells cigarette companies to use plain packs

14 April - France, home of historic Gitanes and Gauloises cigarettes with their iconic blue- and-white packaging, will require all tobacco companies to sell their wares in plain boxes from next year in an anti-smoking crackdown. ... Tobacco firms will from May 2016 have to sell cigarettes in plain packaging with photographs of internal organs damaged by smoking, with the brand appearing only in small lettering. Reuters

Ireland accused of whitewashing childbirth scandal

11 April - One of the ways a government can claim properly to be representing its people is by holding up a magnifying glass to bad things that happened in the past. ... But in Ireland at the moment, a very different sort of thing is happening. It concerns the treatment of hundreds of women, now middle aged or old, who as young mothers to be were maimed by their own doctors in maternity hospitals. The women are all survivors of a dreadful practice called symphysiotomy, in which expectant mothers were sawed open as a medical alternative to Caesarian section in hospitals where, it is assumed, Catholic thinking outweighed medical logic. ... But the compensation scheme has been roundly condemned by civil rights campaigners as a way of protecting the abusers of the women from legal action, because any woman who signs up to the scheme is forced to indemnify the most amazingly long list of people and institutions from any legal redress. Al Jazeera

Italy/Libya: Dozens die in latest migrant sinking

6 April - More than 40 people have drowned off Sicily in the latest sinking of a migrant boat between Libya and Italy, Italian media reports. Almost 10,000 migrants have been rescued trying to reach the Italian coast in recent days. Hundreds have died since the start of the year.
Italy has called for more help from the European Union in handling the crisis. Earlier this week, about 400 people were believed to have drowned when their boat capsized. BBC News

U.S.: E-cig use soared, cigarette use fell among U.S. youth in 2014 – CDC

16 April - Electronic cigarette use among U.S. middle and high school students tripled in 2014 while cigarette use fell to record lows, according to provocative new data that is likely to intensify debate over whether e-cigarettes are a boon or bane to public health. Among high school students, e-cigarette use jumped to 13.4 percent in 2014 from 4.5 percent in 2013, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cigarette use over the same period fell to 9.2 percent from 12.7 percent, the largest year-over-year decline in more than a decade. Reuters

U.S.: F.D.A. warns researchers on claims of drug to detect brain disease

11 April - The developers of a new drug aimed at diagnosing chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative brain disease linked to repeated head trauma, are under scrutiny by the Food and Drug Administration. In February, the F.D.A.’s Office of Prescription Drug Promotion sent a letter to two researchers at U.C.L.A. warning them that they had improperly marketed their drug on the Internet and had made overstated claims about the drug’s potential efficacy. The researchers at U.C.L.A. have been developing a biomarker called FDDNP, which aims to identify tau protein deposits in the brain (a signature of C.T.E.) when patients are given a PET scan. To date, researchers have been able to detect C.T.E. only in brain tissue obtained posthumously. The demand for a technique that can diagnose the disease in living patients is potentially large, given growing concerns about the impact of head trauma in athletes, soldiers and others. In its letter, the F.D.A. warned that the researchers, who are partners with the company Taumark, were not allowed to market the drug and make claims about its safety or effectiveness. New York Times

U.S.: Measles — United States, January 4–April 2, 2015

17 April - ... During January 4–April 2, 2015, a total of 159 measles cases (in 155 U.S. residents and four foreign visitors) from 18 states and the District of Columbia were reported to CDC. Patients ranged in age from 6 weeks to 70 years; 26 (16%) were aged <12 months, 18 (12%) were aged 1–4 years, 27 (17%) were aged 5–19 years, 58 (36%) were aged
20–39 years, and 30 (19%) were aged ≥40 years. Twenty-two patients (14%) were hospitalized, including five with pneumonia. No other complications and no deaths have been reported. A total of 111 cases (70%) have been associated with an outbreak that originated in late December 2014 in Disney theme parks in Orange County, California. The source of the initial exposure has not been identified, but measles cases associated with this outbreak have been reported in seven U.S. states, Mexico, and Canada. Other smaller measles outbreaks in 2015 without a link to Disney theme parks have been reported in Illinois (15 cases), Nevada (nine), and Washington (five). Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: NIH still active in Gulf region five years after oil spill

13 April - Five years after the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion, researchers at the National Institutes of Health are actively working with Gulf region community partners, to learn if any human health problems resulted from the disaster and establish a new research response plan to be better prepared for future disasters. Preliminary results from the NIH-led GuLF STUDY are finding that oil spill cleanup workers reported increased physical symptoms, including cough and wheeze, and mental health symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, compared to nonworkers. Some preliminary findings from researchers in the [Deepwater Horizon Research] consortium and elsewhere indicate that a person’s social environment may have an impact on their ability to cope with disasters or negative health outcomes. For example, individuals who have strong social support systems, or networks of families, friends, and neighbors that can offer psychological, physical, and financial support tend to be more resilient and able to cope and adapt to multiple stressors in post-disaster situations. Researchers have also determined that the seafood in the Gulf is not contaminated by the oil spill -- an important finding for food supply and economics of the region. NIH

U.S.: Obama signs bill fixing Medicare doctors' pay

16 April - U.S. President Barack Obama signed a bill into law on Thursday that repairs the formula for reimbursing Medicare physicians after Congress, in rare bipartisan fashion, passed a fix earlier this week to prevent a 21 percent cut in doctors’ pay. "This was a bipartisan effort," Obama said, adding he hoped the practice of Republicans and Democrats working together would become a habit on Capitol Hill. Reuters

U.S.: Prescription drug spending rose 13 percent in 2014 - IMS report

14 April - U.S. spending on prescription medicines jumped 13 percent to $374 billion in 2014, the biggest percentage increase since 2001, as demand surged for expensive new breakthrough hepatitis C treatments, a report released on Tuesday showed. Demand for newer cancer and multiple sclerosis treatments, price increases on branded medicines, particularly insulin products for diabetes, and the entry of few new generic versions of big-
selling drugs also contributed to the double-digit spending rise in 2014, the report by IMS Health Holdings Inc found. Reuters

U.S.: Texas medical panel votes to limit telemedicine practices in state

10 April - Taking a stand against the rapidly expanding use of telemedicine, the Texas Medical Board voted Friday to sharply restrict the practice in the state, siding with organizations representing doctors over the objections of industry representatives who said the new rules would reduce access to medical care at a time of increasing demand. The vote was the latest salvo in a four-year battle between the state board, which licenses and regulates doctors, and Teladoc, a national company based in Dallas that provides telephone or video consultations with doctors on its staff, typically for routine problems like urinary tract infections, sore throats and rashes. New York Times

U.S.: When keeping a secret trumps the need for care

15 April - ... Millions of young adults have been able to stay on their family insurance plans [until age 26] since that provision of the Affordable Care Act took effect in 2010. But studies show that young people often hesitate to get certain types of medical care, such as mental and behavioral health care, birth control and sexual health screenings, because they don't want their parents to find out through insurance statements. ... We asked young adults to tell us about their concerns about privacy while on their parents insurance. Some said they avoided the doctor altogether, while others paid out of pocket or sought low-cost or free treatment at Planned Parenthood and community clinics. ... But in the long term, it can put a strain on public funds allocated to helping those who truly lack health care, she says. "Wouldn't it be much better if patients who have insurance could just use that resource without worrying?" NPR

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Australia to stop payments to families who refuse child vaccinations

12 April - Australia has announced plans to halt welfare payments and child care rebates to families that refuse to have their children vaccinated — an aggressive move aimed at clamping down on a rising number of parents who opt out of immunizations. Prime Minister Tony Abbott said Sunday that the government was closing a loophole and would
stop payments of up to $11,500 per child (15,000 Australian dollars) for parents who don't get their kids immunized by claiming to be "conscientious objectors." ... [While] 90 percent of Australian children are vaccinated against such illnesses as measles, mumps and rubella, about 40,000 have had parents and guardians take an exemption. ... People who have medical grounds for not vaccinating will continue to receive government payments. NPR

Singapore: Hand, foot, and mouth (HFMD) disease

13 April - According to the World Health Organization, Singapore has reported more than 4,000 cases of hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) during January and February 2015. CDC recommends that travelers to Singapore follow recommendations for hygiene and cleanliness to avoid HFMD. CDC

America chikungunya cases rise by 14,000

13 April - The number of chikungunya cases reported in the Americas grew by 14,788 cases last week, putting the total at 1,371,399 cases, according to an Apr 10 update from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The rise was similar to the 13,239 cases reported the previous week, with both weeks down from increases in the 20,000 to 30,000 range reported in past weeks. ... The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in an Apr 7 update that so far 77 chikungunya infections have been reported in the United States, all of them in travelers returning from affected areas. So far no locally transmitted US cases have been reported this year. Colombia, as in past weeks, reported the biggest increase, accounting for 13,710 of the new cases. Other areas reporting new cases include Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico. CIDRAP News Scan (third item)

Peru: Probe launched in Peru after theft of 18 bodies

14 April - Peruvian authorities are investigating the theft of 18 bodies from the Perpetuo Socorro cemetery in the town of Puerto Eden in the Lambayeque province. This frightful event comes a week after another 15 to 20 bodies were stolen from the San Jose Cemetery, located in the same province. ... According to local media, the police are investigating two possible hypotheses for both thefts. The first is that the robbers were medical students interested in cadavers for surgical training and the second is that they were traditional healers, looking to use body parts in their practice. Al Jazeera
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