

19 December 2014

Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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NOTICE

Because of the holidays, the Army Public Health Weekly Update won't be published for the next two weeks. Publication will resume on 9 January 2015.

Watch the [video](#) for tips on how to stay well this holiday with the Performance Triad!



Contents

U.S. MILITARY

- [An outbreak of *Campylobacter* enteritis associated with a community water supply on a U.S. military installation](#)
- [Comparison of phenology and pathogen prevalence ... of *Ixodes scapularis* removed from soldiers](#)
- [No need for U.S. army help in Sierra Leone Ebola fight: Britain](#)
- [Troop suicide rates decline in second quarter](#)

GLOBAL

- [Can social media aid public health?](#)
- [Drug-resistant malaria: the world's next big health crisis?](#)
- [Global population living six years longer than in 1990: study](#)
- [Lyme disease, fibromyalgia link evaporates](#)
- [Report: 300,000 die worldwide in 2013 childbirths](#)
- [Scientists debate if it's OK to make viruses more dangerous in the lab](#)
- [Scientists report headway in hunt for dengue vaccine](#)
- [EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE](#)
- [CDC emergency response – CDC response to 2014 Ebola in the United States and West Africa](#)
- [Challenges in responding to the Ebola epidemic — four rural counties, Liberia, August–November 2014](#)
- [Dreaming up a safer, cooler PPE for Ebola fighters](#)
- [Ebola centres overflow as Sierra Leone steps up fight](#)
- [Ebola serum supply reaches Liberia](#)
- [Ebola total tops 18,000, with hints of slowing in Sierra Leone](#)
- [Fewer Ebola cases go unreported than thought, study finds](#)
- [Surveys, Firestone model yield lessons for aiding Ebola survivors](#)
- [Survivors cope with new Ebola after-effects](#)

INFLUENZA

- [Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)
- [CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report](#)
- [DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program](#)
- [Flu News Europe](#)
- [Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

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- USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report
- AVIAN INFLUENZA
- H5N2, H5N8 avian flu viruses surface in US
- Ninth Egyptian dies of H5N1 bird flu: Health Ministry
- Officials raise estimate of flu-related deaths in European seals

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

- Lessons learned from a textbook outbreak: EHEC-O157:H7 infections associated with the consumption of raw meat products, June 2012, Limburg, Belgium
- You don't want to monkey around with monkey malaria

WELLNESS

- Age of first menstruation linked to heart disease in women
- Belly fat tied to sudden cardiac death
- Congress to nutritionists: Don't talk about the environment
- Low-glycemic diets may not improve cardiovascular outcomes when compared to high-glycemic diets
- New online calculator estimates cardiovascular disease risk
- Quit smoking drug from Eastern Europe better than nicotine Tx?
- Shrinking psych hospitals may be linked with rising prison populations
- Teens now reach for e-cigarettes over regular ones
- Tragic deaths highlight the dangers of powdered pure caffeine

USAFRICOM

- Agencies warn of hunger in Ebola zone
- Ethiopia: Gang rape spurs calls for reform in Ethiopia
- South Africa on high alert for measles outbreak
- South Sudan's doctor shortage
- Tanzania: Poor water and hygiene 'kills mothers and newborns'

USCENTCOM

- Saudi Arabia: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

USEUCOM

- England: Shift workers 'sicker and fatter'
- Europe: Obesity 'could be a disability' - EU courts rule
- Ukraine: Illegal coal mines a 'lifeline' in Ukraine

USNORTHCOM

- Canada, U.S.: NHL mumps outbreak grows with Sidney Crosby diagnosis
- U.S.: Abuse of synthetic drugs declines across U.S.
- U.S.: CDC reports 28 more EV-D68 cases, 1 polio-like illness
- U.S.: CDC - The 10 most critical public-health missions, challenges of 2014
- U.S.: Citing health risks, Cuomo bans fracking in New York State
- U.S.: FDA approves blood test that gauges heart attack risk
- U.S.: FDA approves device to remove some pathogens from donated plasma
- U.S.: Murthy confirmed as Surgeon General
- U.S. report: Syphilis spikes among sexually transmitted diseases
- U.S.: Syphilis test gets OK for wider use

USPACOM

- Indonesia: Rescue efforts stopped by heavy rain following deadly mudslide

- [Thailand: Ministry of Public Health tries to tackle teenage pregnancy](#)

USSOUTHCOM

- [Brazil: West Nile virus](#)
- [Caribbean chikungunya outbreak surpasses 1 million cases](#)

U.S. MILITARY

An outbreak of *Campylobacter* enteritis associated with a community water supply on a U.S. military installation

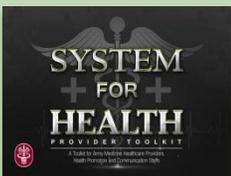
November 2014 - An outbreak of acute gastroenteritis involving 249 persons, 32% of whom were hospitalized, occurred on a U.S. Army installation in 1990. *Campylobacter jejuni* was isolated from 81 of 163 (50%) persons cultured. Seventeen isolates of *C. jejuni* available for serotyping were Lior serotype 5. The outbreak remained restricted to one recruit barracks area and adjacent Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps cadet barracks. Infection of sequential cohorts of recruits over an interval of 3 weeks suggested a continuing or intermittent common source. Contaminated food was not implicated because affected persons ate at separate dining facilities and other facilities with the same food sources had no associated illnesses. There was a strong association between the amount of water consumed by recruits and risk of diarrhea (chi-square test for trend, $p < 0.001$). Samples of drinking water collected in the affected area had no residual chlorine and when cultured yielded greater than 200 colonies of coliform bacteria per 100 mL of water sampled. Although *Campylobacter* was not isolated from water, living and dead birds were found in an elevated water storage tank providing drinking water to the affected area. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Comparison of phenology and pathogen prevalence ... of *Ixodes scapularis* removed from soldiers

4 December - Since 1997, human-biting ticks submitted to the Department of Defense Human Tick Test Kit Program (HTTKP) of the US Army Public Health Command have been tested for pathogens by PCR. We noted differences in the phenology and infection prevalence among *Ixodes scapularis* ticks submitted from military installations in different geographic regions. ... There were clear differences in *I. scapularis* phenology, pathogen prevalence and rates of co-infection among the three military installations. Seasonal and temperature differences between the three sites and length of time a population had been established in each region may contribute to the observed differences. The synchrony of adults and nymphs observed in the upper Midwest has implications for pathogen infection prevalence. The EML agent was only detected in Minnesota and Wisconsin, supporting the previous assertion that this pathogen is currently limited to the upper Midwest. [Parasites & Vectors](#)

System for Health: Provider Toolkit

A new toolkit for Army Medicine healthcare providers, health promotion and communication staff is now available in the [USAPHC Health Information Product eCatalog](#). The toolkit contains lists of health information products by medical facility and other resources.



Chemical Warfare Agents

During OIF and OND, Service members who demolished or handled older explosive ordnance may have been exposed to chemical warfare agents. If you think you were exposed to chemical warfare agents during your deployment, call the DoD hotline at 800-497-6261 and provide your contact information.



No need for U.S. army help in Sierra Leone Ebola fight: Britain

16 December - Britain said on Tuesday it would not be seeking U.S. military assistance to fight Ebola in Sierra Leone where it expects to see "enormous change" by the end of January following a surge in response measures. As a U.S. operation of 3,000 troops begins to turn the tide against the deadly virus in neighboring Liberia, calls have grown for it to shift resources towards ally Britain, which is leading the response in Sierra Leone. ... [The] head of the British taskforce Donal Brown said he expected a breakthrough within four to six weeks. "The pieces are in place to fight the disease, which weren't here a month ago. So I think you will see enormous change in the next few weeks," he told Reuters. [Reuters](#)

Troop suicide rates decline in second quarter

11 December – The Defense Department released the quarterly suicide report for April through June of 2014, and the numbers, officials said, indicate a drop from first-quarter statistics for all services and components. The second-quarter report summary showed 70 suicides among active duty service members, 14 suicides among Reserve component service members and 20 suicides among National Guardsmen. In an off-camera briefing, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren reported comparison first quarter statistics of 74 active duty members, 24 Reservists and 22 National Guardsmen. [U.S. Department of Defense](#)

[top of page...](#)

GLOBAL

Can social media aid public health?

14 December - Here's an angle Mark Zuckerberg has probably not yet mined: restaurant reviews and bookings as surveillance tools for public health departments. Speaking at a mobile health conference, John Brownstein, PhD, an associate professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School's Center for BioInformatics, said 10% of the restaurant reviews on Yelp are related to food-borne illness, and consumer's guesses about which ingredients provoked their distress are surprisingly accurate. A study he co-authored and published in Preventive Medicine in October, demonstrated that Yelp could be used as a real-time surveillance tool. ... Cancellations on Open Table, an online service for booking restaurant reservations, are another surprisingly useful data source as they appear to peak during flu season. "By tapping into what tables are available at restaurants in different cities, you can actually map out flu," he told MedPage Today. ... A third report geocoded Facebook "likes" of sedentary activities, such as TV and movie watching, and compared them with "likes" for physical activity. The study conducted in urban areas across the country including New York

Flu Vaccine Poster

A new flu vaccine poster is available for download from the USAPHC [Health Information Products eCatalog](#). It encourages getting the flu vaccine as soon as possible although some of the flu viruses spreading are different from what is in the vaccine.



City, showed that the couch potato "likes" mirrored the obesity prevalence in certain New York neighborhoods. [MedPage Today](#)

Drug-resistant malaria: the world's next big health crisis?

16 December - ...Malaria death rates dropped by 47 percent between 2000 and 2014 worldwide but it still killed some 584,000 people in 2013, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Much of the success in fighting the disease is due to the use of combination therapies (ACTs) based on artemisinin, a Chinese herb derivative, which is now under threat as malaria parasites have been building up resistance to the drugs. Experts say Myanmar, which has the largest malaria burden in the region, is the next frontier in the spread of resistance to artemisinin. Positioned between the Andaman Sea and the Himalayas and bordering India and China - home to 40 percent of the world's population - Myanmar is in a unique position to halt the spread of resistance to India and Africa. [Reuters](#)

Global population living six years longer than in 1990: study

17 December - Global life expectancy has risen by more than six years since 1990 thanks to falling death rates from cancer and heart disease in rich countries and better survival in poor countries from diarrhea, tuberculosis and malaria. In an analysis from the 2013 Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study, health researchers said, however, that while life expectancy is rising almost everywhere in the world, one notable exception is southern sub-Saharan Africa, where deaths from HIV/AIDS have erased some five years of life expectancy since 1990. [Reuters](#)

Lyme disease, fibromyalgia link evaporates



14 December - Lyme disease is not a trigger for fibromyalgia, according to a long-term assessment of patients with culture-confirmed Lyme disease. The prevalence of fibromyalgia among patients with culture-confirmed Lyme disease who were followed at the Lyme Disease Diagnostic Center in Westchester County, N.Y., for up to 20 years was no greater than that in the general population. ... Earlier studies that suggested that Lyme disease may trigger fibromyalgia were performed before the use of two-tier serologic testing for Lyme disease and therefore may have included patients who did not actually have Lyme disease, the investigators wrote online in *Arthritis & Rheumatology*. [MedPage Today](#)

Report: 300,000 die worldwide in 2013 childbirths

12 December - Almost 300,000 women, primarily in developing countries, died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth in 2013 according to a new report that blames the deaths on a lack of safe water, sanitation and adequate hygiene. A paper

Classified Version of the Weekly Update

An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the **SECRET** level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site:

<http://phc.army.smil.mil>

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

To access this version, you will need a **SECRET** clearance and a SIPRNet account.

Links

[A-Z Index](#)

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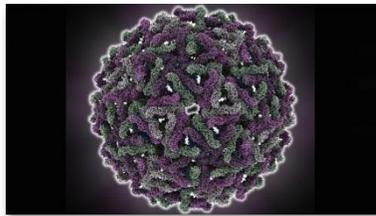
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published in the journal *PLOS Medicine* reports that some 38 percent of healthcare facilities in 54 developing countries continue to lack proper sanitation and a source of clean water, putting women who give birth there at increased risk of death. [VOA](#)

Scientists debate if it's OK to make viruses more dangerous in the lab

16 December - Imagine that scientists wanted to take Ebola virus and see if it could ever become airborne by deliberately causing mutations in the lab and then searching through those new viruses to see if any spread easily through the air. Would that be OK? The question was posed by David Relman, a microbiologist at Stanford University, at a two-day meeting being held National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C., to discuss whether some experiments with germs are so risky that the dangers aren't worth the potential benefits. Researchers call these "gain-of-function" experiments. ... The work has split the scientific community. ... Officials said they wanted to reassess the risks and benefits, and the meeting that started Monday is part of that effort. [NPR](#)

Scientists report headway in hunt for dengue vaccine



16 December - Dengue — aka "breakbone fever" — has been a tough nut to crack when it comes to making a vaccine. The problem is that the mosquito-borne virus comes in four flavors, or strains. Vaccines that work on one strain haven't worked well on the others. Now scientists at Imperial College London have discovered a

potential way around this problem. Immunologist Gavin Screaton and his colleagues have found molecules — specifically antibodies — in human blood that stop all forms of dengue. The molecules offer a road map for developing a simple vaccine that works on all types of dengue at the same time, the team reported Monday in the journal *Nature Immunology*. [NPR](#)

EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

CDC emergency response – CDC response to 2014 Ebola in the United States and West Africa

- **NEW:** [NIOSH Factsheet: The Buddy System](#)
- **NEW:** [Updated Case Counts](#)
- **NEW:** [Poster: How to Safely Give ORS \(Oral Rehydration Solution\)](#)

Challenges in responding to the Ebola epidemic — four rural counties, Liberia, August–November 2014

16 December - The first cases of Ebola virus disease (Ebola) in West Africa were identified in Guinea on March 22, 2014. On March 30, the first Liberian case was identified in Foya Town, Lofa County, near the Guinean border. Because the majority of early cases occurred in Lofa and Montserrado counties, resources were concentrated in these counties during the first several months of the response, and these counties have seen signs of successful disease control. By October 2014, the epidemic had reached all 15 counties of Liberia. During August 27–September 10, 2014, CDC in collaboration with the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare assessed county Ebola response plans in four rural counties (Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Rivercess, and Sinoe), to identify county-specific challenges in executing their Ebola response plans, and to provide recommendations and training to enhance control efforts. ... At the time of assessment, county health teams reported lacking adequate training in core Ebola response strategies and reported facing many challenges because of poor transportation and communication networks. Development of communication and transportation network strategies for communities with limited access to roads and limited means of communication in addition to adequate training in Ebola response strategies is critical for successful management of Ebola in remote areas.

[Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

Dreaming up a safer, cooler PPE for Ebola fighters

17 December - ... [The] reason to make a better protective suit for Ebola workers is very clear. The current "personal protective equipment" doesn't work very well. The suits, which look like futuristic space garb, overheat. The visor fogs up. And the disposable garments can end up carrying Ebola virus out of the wards and contaminating the very people they're supposed to protect. The U.S. Agency for International Development has just staged an Ebola Grand Challenge to come up with a new suit that doesn't cost much more than the current one (which runs about \$12-\$17). The winning design came from a team of more than 80 researchers and students at Johns Hopkins, beating out 1,500 other entries. ... Their new yellow suit at first looks a lot like the other Ebola suits. But it has key differences. For starters, the garment is much easier to take off. "It really starts with this breakaway zipper that allows you to open the rear entry or the opening of the suit very easily," he says Brandon Craft, who runs a biomedical design company and lectures at Hopkins. ... The other big innovation is the small, battery-powered cooling pack that straps on the worker's belt. "You'll have air blowing out that is room temperature but it's 0% humidity," says Harikrishna Tandri, a cardiologist at Johns Hopkins. [NPR](#)

Ebola centres overflow as Sierra Leone steps up fight

17 December - Ebola centres in Sierra Leone overflowed on Wednesday as health workers combed the streets of the capital Freetown for patients, after the government launched a major operation to contain the epidemic in West Africa's worst-hit country. President Ernest Bai Koroma said on national television that travel between all parts of the country had been

restricted as part of "Operation Western Area Surge", and public gatherings would be strictly controlled in the run-up to Christmas. ... [Street]-by-street searches form a key part of a month-long push by the government, a British task force and international groups in the populous west of Sierra Leone, where the epidemic is raging. Their aim is to score a breakthrough against the disease within four to six weeks. [Reuters](#)

Ebola serum supply reaches Liberia

15 December - Liberia has begun treating Ebola patients with serum therapy - a treatment made from the blood of recovered survivors. Doctors hope the experimental treatment could help combat the virus that has been sweeping West Africa and killing thousands of people. ... Ebola patients treated in the UK and the US have already received this type of treatment. Doctors in Liberia will monitor how safe and effective the serum treatment being given at the ELWA Hospital in Monrovia is. [BBC News](#)

Ebola total tops 18,000, with hints of slowing in Sierra Leone

17 December - Sierra Leone's rising Ebola activity seems to be slowing as a major effort to knock down the disease gets under way; disease incidence is still fluctuating in Guinea and cases continue to decline in Liberia, the World Health Organization (WHO) said today in its latest update. The global Ebola total as of Dec 14 has reached 18,603 cases, along with 6,915 reported deaths, the WHO said. ... The WHO said progress is occurring in all three of the hardest-hit countries toward the United Nations' goal of isolating and treating 100% of Ebola patients and safely burying 100% of those who die from the disease by Jan 1. All countries now have enough treatment beds, though some are unevenly distributed, resulting in shortages in some areas, the WHO said. Nationally, all three countries have the capacity to bury Ebola victims, though there may be gaps in some areas. The WHO said all districts in the countries can access a lab within 24 hours after sample collection and that, overall, more than 80% of contacts are being traced. A running tally of Ebola infections in health workers, the hardest-hit group in the outbreak, shows that 632 cases have been reported so far, and 358 of them have been fatal. The WHO said five new health worker infections were reported through Dec 14, all of them from Guinea. In a breakdown of cases by gender and age, the WHO said the gender distribution is nearly equal at 65 per 100,000 population in males and 66 per 100,000 population in females. Compared with children, individuals between ages 15 and 44 years are three times more likely to be infected and those 45 and older are nearly four times more likely to be infected. [CIDRAP](#)

Fewer Ebola cases go unreported than thought, study finds

16 December - Transmission of the Ebola virus occurs mostly within families, in hospitals and at funerals, not randomly like the flu, Yale scientists said Tuesday, and far fewer cases go unreported than has previously been estimated. That implies, they said, that the epidemic is unlikely to reach the gloomy scenarios of hundreds of thousands of cases that

studies released in September had forecast were possible; the most pessimistic one, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, had predicted up to 1.4 million cases by late January. ... The researchers said they had too little data to predict how many West Africans could eventually be infected, but enough to show that the dire predictions were inaccurate. ... By looking at virus samples gathered in Sierra Leone and contract-tracing data from Liberia, the scientists working on the new study estimated that about 17 percent of cases in West Africa go unreported, up to a maximum of 70 percent. That is far fewer than earlier estimates. [New York Times](#)

Surveys, Firestone model yield lessons for aiding Ebola survivors

12 December - The growing number of people in West Africa who survived Ebola face stigma and other complex issues because of the unique nature of the disease, and efforts to understand and meet their needs are yielding key lessons for responders, according to reports today from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The growing number of people in West Africa who survived Ebola face stigma and other complex issues because of the unique nature of the disease, and efforts to understand and meet their needs are yielding key lessons for responders, according to reports today from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). ... [Liberia's Firestone] district developed its own survivor reintegration program, enrolling its first patient in August. During the 3-day time span between tests to confirm survivors' blood was free of Ebola, they were given education and counseling. Meanwhile, teams started preparing survivors' communities by meeting with neighbors and community leaders and emphasizing that the people coming home were no longer sick and were free of the virus. ... Survivors were given a "solidarity kit" that included a new mattress, bedding, towels, an insecticide-treated mosquito net, food, clothing, toys for children, and cash, according to the report. After a reintegration ceremony, Firestone medical staff visits all survivors weekly for 3 months to provide clinical assessments and psychosocial support. [CIDRAP](#)

Survivors cope with new Ebola after-effects

15 December - Victims spared by the deadly disease are reporting blindness and other unexpected post-Ebola health issues. ... Kamara is one of 40 percent of Ebola survivors to have gone on to develop eye problems, according to a recent study carried out by the World Health Organisation and Kenema's District Health Management Team. It has been more than a month since the district saw its last case of Ebola, and attention is turning to the plight of survivors. The results of the survey, a copy of which was seen by Al Jazeera, outline a raft of physical, social and psychological problems the survivors are experiencing. Seventy-nine percent, for example, now suffer from joint pain; 42 percent have problems sleeping, while more than one-third of those surveyed experienced peeling of the skin. Many others reported problems with their reproductive system. "There is so little written about post-Ebola problems," said Maggie Nanyonga, a WHO consultant working with Ebola survivors in Kenema district. "We don't know if it's the drugs that are causing it, or the disease, or just stress." [Al Jazeera](#)

[top of page...](#)

INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 49:

- In NORTHCOM influenza activity has started to increase and there has been a noticeable increase in the number of A/H3N2 cases among service members and dependents.
- In EUCOM influenza activity is low and ILI and P&I activity is at expected levels.
- In PACOM, influenza activity was minimal and ILI and P&I increased to baseline.
- In CENTCOM and AFRICOM ILI and P&I activity increased and is above baseline and previous seasons.
- In SOUTHCOM there has been a marked increase the cases of A/H3N2 in weeks 46-49. [AFHSC DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 49 (November 30-December 6, 2014), influenza activity continued to increase in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 16,093 specimens tested, ... 3,415 (21.2%) 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 2.5%, above the national baseline of 2.0%. [FluView](#)

DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

- During 23 November - 6 December 2014, a total of 216 specimens were collected and received from 47 locations. Results were finalized for 146 specimens from 39 locations. During Week 48, the laboratory identified 26 influenza A(H3N2). During Week 49, 77 influenza A(H3N2) and four influenza B were identified.
- On 4 December 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a press release indicating early data suggests a potentially severe flu season. Take away points:

- A(H3N2) seasons are often associated with a more severe influenza season
- Approximately half of the A(H3N2) viruses analyzed are different from this season's vaccine virus
- Vaccination is strongly recommended as it will protect against other flu viruses and may provide some protection against the drift virus
- Tamiflu and Relenza (antivirals) can reduce severe complications. Treatment of high risk personnel should begin soon after symptoms develop, without waiting for lab results (CDC Press Release, cited 9 December 2014). [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

Flu News Europe

Week 49/2014

- In week 49/2014, influenza activity remained low across the WHO European Region.
- Twenty countries reported sporadic influenza activity and nine reported increasing trends in consultations for influenza-like illness (ILI) and/or acute respiratory infection (ARI).
- Of the 848 specimens tested from sentinel ILI and ARI patients from 35 countries, 34 (4%) from 14 countries tested positive for influenza virus. At present, the predominant influenza virus subtype circulating is A(H3N2).
- Two countries reported a total of 14 hospitalized laboratory-confirmed influenza cases that were admitted to intensive care units, similar to that in the previous week.
- The characterization data in Europe show the same differences between most of the circulating A(H3N2) viruses and the virus used in the influenza vaccine, as also reported by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<http://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00374.asp>).

Season

- Although an increasing number of countries reported sporadic influenza virus detections, there is no indication that the influenza season has started in the Region, which is normal for this time of year.
- No indications of increased mortality have been reported through the European monitoring of excess mortality for public health action project. [Flu News Europe](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week 50 (through 13 December 2014):

- Influenza: Three cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were

moderately at Fort Benning and Fort Jackson. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 6 December 2014 (Week 49)

- Synopsis: Based on influenza testing, influenza activity appears higher in SRMC than other regions. Overall influenza activity continues to increase in both Army and civilian populations.
- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 49 were 6% lower than for the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: No hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC through DRSi in week 49. To date, one hospitalized influenza case has been reported in an unvaccinated retiree.
- Viral specimens: During week 49, 393 of 1279 (31%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens; 312 of 1132 (28%) specimens tested for influenza A were positive. SRMC reported the most influenza A-positive specimens (75%), followed by NRMC (14%), WRMC (10%), ERM (2%), and PRMC (0.3%). [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

AVIAN INFLUENZA

H5N2, H5N8 avian flu viruses surface in US

16 December - US authorities today reported finding wild birds in Washington state infected with two different highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses, H5N2 and H5N8, raising questions about possible connections with recent H5N2 outbreaks across the border in Canada and with an Asian H5N8 strain that is now hitting European poultry farms. ... Also today, Italy became the fourth European country in the past few weeks to report an H5N8 outbreak in poultry, with an outbreak on a turkey farm, and Germany reported a second poultry H5N8 outbreak at a site distant from its first H5N8 event. [CIDRAP](#)

Ninth Egyptian dies of H5N1 bird flu: Health Ministry

17 December - A 20-year-old Egyptian woman died from bird flu on Wednesday, the ninth death in the country from the virus out of 18 identified cases, the Health Ministry said. ... Out of the nine other infected patients, seven have been discharged and two others are still sick in hospital, he said. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), from 2003 through Oct. 2, 2014, there have been 668 laboratory-confirmed human cases of H5N1 infection officially reported from 16 countries. Of these cases, 393 have died. [Reuters](#)

Officials raise estimate of flu-related deaths in European seals

16 December - About 3,000 seals off the coast of Sweden and Denmark are thought to have been killed by avian influenza this year, probably by an H10N7 virus, according to an Agence France-Presse (AFP) story today. ... Determining a number with any accuracy is difficult because dead animals have likely sunk. "We still don't have the full picture of how many seals are affected or exactly how the infection has spread," the story quotes a biologist at the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management as saying. Most seals in the area are thought by the agency to have been infected by avian flu and to have developed antibodies. Other northern European countries including Norway and the Netherlands have also experienced seal die-offs from avian flu recently, and Germany has seen hundreds of seal deaths off the North Sea coast, according to media reports. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

[top of page...](#)

VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Lessons learned from a textbook outbreak: EHEC-O157:H7 infections associated with the consumption of raw meat products, June 2012, Limburg, Belgium

15 December - ... The outbreak involved 24 cases, of which 17 were laboratory-confirmed. Five cases developed Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) and fifteen were hospitalized. Cases reported a significantly higher consumption of "steak tartare", a raw meat product (OR 48.12; 95% CI; 5.62- 416.01). Cases were also more likely to buy meat-products at certain butcheries (OR 11.67; 95% CI; 1.41 - 96.49). PFGE and IS629-printing demonstrated that the vtx1a vtx2a eae ehxA positive EHEC O157:H7 strains isolated from three meat products and all seventeen human stool samples were identical. In a slaughterhouse, identified by the trace-back investigation, a carcass infected with a different EHEC strain was found and confiscated. We present a well described and effectively investigated foodborne outbreak associated with meat products. Our main recommendations are the facilitation and acceleration of the outbreak detection and the development of a communication plan to reaches all persons at risk. [Archives of Public Health](#)

You don't want to monkey around with monkey malaria



11 December - In Southeast Asia, the battle against malaria is growing even more complicated. And it's all because of monkeys, who carry a form of malaria that until a few years ago wasn't a problem for people. "According to the textbooks there are only four species of plasmodium parasites that cause malaria in humans,"

says Balbir Singh, the director of the Malaria Research Center at the University of Malaysia in Sarawak. Now a fifth malaria parasite, called *plasmodium knowlesi*, has become the leading cause of malaria hospitalizations in Malaysian Borneo. "At some hospitals in Malaysian Borneo," Singh says, "Up to 95 percent, even 100 percent of the cases are actually this monkey malaria." The knowlesi parasite used to be found only in monkeys. But as farmers have cleared more land for palm oil plantations and new hydroelectric dams are built, the area's long-tailed macaques are being squeezed out of their original habitats. So the monkeys end up living closer to people. And the mosquitoes that transmit the parasite are now biting and infecting humans. [NPR](#)

[top of page...](#)

WELLNESS

Age of first menstruation linked to heart disease in women

15 December - Most women begin their menstrual cycles at around the age of 13. A new study suggested that those who start menstruating a few years before or after that average appear to be at increased risk of heart disease and stroke. The study by researchers at Oxford University in Britain analyzed data collected from 1.3 million mostly white women - ages 50 to 64. They noticed a pattern among women who had their first menstrual cycle at age ten or younger, or 17 or older. [VOA](#)

Belly fat tied to sudden cardiac death

17 December - Having a "beer belly" significantly increases the risk for sudden cardiac death, a new study has found. ... Researchers followed 14,941 men and women, average age 54 at the start of the study, for almost 13 years. The subjects underwent detailed health examinations five times over the course of the study, and there were 253 sudden cardiac deaths. ... As the researchers expected, those who died suddenly had higher rates of other cardiac risk factors, including obesity, hypertension, high cholesterol and more. But independent of these factors, those with the highest waist-to-hip ratio had more than

double the risk of sudden cardiac death compared with those in the normal range. The increased risk was apparent only in nonsmokers. [New York Times](#)

Congress to nutritionists: Don't talk about the environment

15 December - A government-appointed group of top nutrition experts, assigned to lay the scientific groundwork for a new version of the nation's dietary guidelines, decided earlier this year to collect data on the environmental implication of different food choices. Congress now has slapped them down. Lawmakers attached a list of "congressional directives" to a massive spending bill that was passed by both the House and the Senate in recent days. One of those directives expresses "concern" that the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee "is showing an interest in incorporating agriculture production practices and environmental factors" into their recommendations, and directs the Obama administration to ignore such factors in the next revision of the guidelines, which is due out next year. ... Trying to decide exactly which foods are better than others can provide endless arguments. But economist Thomas Hertel, at Purdue University, says a few big points are pretty clear. Among the biggest: Producing meat is especially costly, and beef in particular. Beef cattle release methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. In addition, growing food for animals takes a lot of land. [NPR](#)

Low-glycemic diets may not improve cardiovascular outcomes when compared to high-glycemic diets

16 December - A study comparing low- and high-glycemic index diets found no significant difference between the two plans in reducing cardiovascular risk or reversing insulin resistance. A number of widely-followed diets have been based on the idea that focusing on foods with a low-glycemic index might improve cardiovascular risk factors and lower the risk of developing diabetes. But an NIH-funded study suggests that using the glycemic index to select foods may not improve insulin sensitivity, lower HDL or LDL lipid levels or reduce blood pressure levels. [NIH](#)

New online calculator estimates cardiovascular disease risk

December 2014 - The new **Healthy Heart Score** developed by researchers at HSPH gives individuals an easy method to estimate their risk of developing cardiovascular disease (CVD) based on simple lifestyle habits. The free web-based survey also gives users practical tips for improving their scores by incorporating heart-healthy habits into their daily lives. The calculator walks users through a series of easy-to-follow questions about their lifestyle, such as "Do you smoke cigarettes?" and "During the past year, how often, on average, do you eat a serving of fruit?" Users receive a risk score of low



(green), moderate (yellow), or high (red), and a printable assessment with tips for improvement such as, "Instead of sliced deli turkey or chicken in sandwiches, try rotisserie chicken or roasted turkey." [The Nutrition Source Update](#)

Quit smoking drug from Eastern Europe better than nicotine Tx?

17 December - Cytisine, a smoking cessation medication available only in Eastern Europe, worked better than conventional nicotine-replacement therapy in a clinical trial. The drug yielded a 1-month continuous abstinence rate of 40% compared with 31% among quit line callers provided nicotine patches along with gum or lozenges ($P < 0.001$), Natalie Walker, PhD, of the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and colleagues found. The number needed to treat with cytisine versus was 11, they reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The 25-day course of treatment remained superior to 8 weeks of nicotine replacement at the 6-month follow-up on one of the two typical measures of long-term efficacy (continuous abstinence 22% versus 15%, $P = 0.002$). [MedPage Today](#)

Shrinking psych hospitals may be linked with rising prison populations

12 December - Reducing the number of beds in facilities for psychiatric patients is linked to an increase in prison populations, according to a new study. Prison population rose as the number of psychiatric beds decreased since 1990 among six South American countries, researchers found. ... For the new study, the researchers used data on the availability of psychiatric beds since 1990 in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Then they compared that data with data on the prison populations of those countries. ... The reason the researchers looked at data starting in 1990 is that those countries signed a declaration reducing the number of psychiatric beds and increasing the availability of outpatient mental health services. ... Overall, they found the number of psychiatric beds in each country decreased while their prison populations increased. ... On average, the researchers found that prison populations increased by about three people for every psychiatric bed that was eliminated after they accounted for economic growth and income inequality. ... Mundt said the next step would be to see whether people released from psychiatric facilities actually ended up in prisons or jails. [Reuters](#)

Teens now reach for e-cigarettes over regular ones

16 December - ... [According] to the survey, [e-cigarettes are] more popular among teenagers than anyone thought. Richard Miech of the University of Michigan says nearly 9 percent of eighth graders and more than 16 percent of 10th graders had used an e-cigarette in the past month. ... We found that among eighth and 10th graders, more than twice as many reported using an e-cigarette than a regular tobacco cigarette. And among 12th graders, we find in the past 30 days about 17 percent had reported using an e-cigarette, whereas only 14 percent had reported using a regular tobacco cigarette. ... STEIN: The results come from a federally-funded survey of more than 41,000 students

at more than 370 schools around the country. [NPR](#)

Tragic deaths highlight the dangers of powdered pure caffeine

16 December - ... I cannot say strongly enough how important it is to avoid using powdered pure caffeine. The people most drawn to it are our children, teenagers, and young adults, especially students who want to work longer to study, athletes who want to improve their performance, and others who want to lose weight. The powdered pure caffeine that the Stiners and Sweatts brought to show us—readily available for purchase online—was packaged in the same way as protein powder and marketed as a source of energy, rather than a stimulant. The reality is that these products are 100 percent caffeine, with a single teaspoon roughly the equivalent to the amount in 25 cups of coffee. Pure caffeine is a powerful stimulant and even very small amounts may cause an accidental overdose. [FDA Voice](#)

[top of page...](#)

USAFRICOM

Agencies warn of hunger in Ebola zone

17 December - The Ebola outbreak ravaging West Africa could double the number of people facing hunger in the three worst-affected countries to more than one million by March, two United Nations agencies warned Wednesday. In a joint announcement, the World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization said food shortages caused by crop losses in the three countries, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, had been exacerbated by border closings, quarantines, hunting bans and other restrictions. The agencies said that the crisis had already left 230,000 people in Guinea, 170,000 in Liberia and 120,000 in Sierra Leone "severely food insecure," and that those numbers would double in the next three months "unless access to food is drastically improved and measures are put in place to safeguard crop and livestock production." [New York Times](#)

Ethiopia: Gang rape spurs calls for reform in Ethiopia

17 December - Inside a gated home on the western outskirts of Ethiopia's capital, a picture of Hanna Lalango is framed in a wreath of flowers just beginning to wilt around the edges. The 16-year-old girl died on November 1, about a month after she entered a public mini-bus and was gang-raped by the strangers on board. ... [In] Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populous country, the reaction to Hanna's death has so far been subdued. ... [Violence] against women remains an entrenched and often taboo issue. Eighty percent of Ethiopians live in rural areas, where patriarchal customs often effectively turn women into second-class citizens. ... Had his daughter survived, Lalango said he would not have made this case

public, as the shame would have shadowed Hanna for the rest of her life. Women's rights activists suspect this impulse to keep sexual assaults secret has caused gender-based violence to often go unreported. [Al Jazeera](#)

South Africa on high alert for measles outbreak

16 December - Health authorities on Monday placed South Africa on high alert for a measles outbreak as cases have been reported in five provinces since earlier this year. About 49 laboratory confirmed measles cases have been reported since the beginning of this year, said Joe Maila, spokesperson of the National Department of Health. Majority cases were reported in the Northern Cape, with 18 measles detected. There was indeed a measles outbreak in South Africa, Maila said, "However, we are doing everything to that effect to make sure that we contain it. So that it should not spread at the level that people are getting worried." [Global Times](#)

South Sudan's doctor shortage

14 December - Northern Bahr el Ghazal is South Sudan's poorest state and is generally neglected by national and international aid organisations, which focus instead on regions of active conflict. It has one principal hospital in the main town of Aweil, and aid group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) runs the facility in partnership with the Ministry of Health. The hospital caters to the entire state and a regional population of up to 1.4 million. The ministry has four doctors and MSF usually has five on duty at any one time. In 2007-2008, MSF launched a project in Aweil to help reduce maternal mortality rates, which was about 50 percent at the time. This year, catastrophic rates of malaria infections have plagued Northern Bahr el Ghazal during the wet season from March to October - four times the cases from 2013. MSF in Aweil recorded some 20,000 treatments given for the disease in the past five months. Infection levels have finally started to come down with the onset of the dry season, but in recent months thousands of people came for screenings and more than 70 percent tested positive for the disease. [Al Jazeera](#)

Tanzania: Poor water and hygiene 'kills mothers and newborns'



13 December - ... A study in the same journal reveals fewer than a third of births in Tanzania occur in places with safe water and basic sanitation. In 2013, one in every 44 women in the country faced dying in childbirth. Lenka Benova, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said: "Nearly 8,000 women in Tanzania die each year in or immediately after childbirth." This situation is not limited to Tanzania. What is frustrating is we know infection-related deaths are preventable, with the addition of clean water, basic toilets and good hygiene practice. [BBC News](#)

[top of page...](#)

USCENTCOM

Saudi Arabia: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

17 December - Between 20 November and 7 December 2014, the National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) notified WHO of 11 additional cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection, including 4 deaths. ... Contact tracing of household contacts and healthcare contacts is ongoing for these cases. The National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also notified WHO of the death of 1 previously reported MERS-CoV case. Globally, the WHO has been notified of 938 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including at least 343 related deaths. [WHO](#)

[top of page...](#)

USEUCOM

England: Shift workers 'sicker and fatter'

14 December - Higher rates of obesity and ill-health have been found in shift workers than the general population. Health Survey for England data showed they were in worse health despite often being young. The lead researcher told the BBC that the rise of zero-hours contracts may be increasing the numbers doing shift work and could raise "pretty serious problems" for the nation's health. Scientists said it was "fairly clear now" that shift work was unhealthy. The report, by the Health and Social Care Information Centre, showed 33% of men and 22% of women of working age were doing shift work. They defined shifts as employment outside 0700-1900. [BBC News](#)

Europe: Obesity 'could be a disability' - EU courts rule

18 December - Obesity can constitute a disability in certain circumstances, the EU's highest court has ruled. The European Court of Justice was asked to consider the case of a male childminder in Denmark who says he was sacked for being too fat. The court said that if obesity could hinder "full and effective participation" at work then it could count as a disability. The ruling is binding across the EU. Judges said that obesity in itself was not a disability - but if a person had a long-term impairment because of their obesity, then they would be protected by disability legislation. [BBC News](#)

Ukraine: Illegal coal mines a 'lifeline' in Ukraine



16 December - The conflict in eastern Ukraine, where separatist rebels have fought against the Ukrainian government since March, has disrupted one of the pillars of the region's economy: coal. Seventy percent of the Donbass area's coal mines have closed because of the fighting, and just 24 remain operational, Ukraine's deputy minister of energy and coal said in September. That has bestowed an increased importance upon the small, illegal mines known as kopankas. ... This kopanka, like many others, has virtually no health or safety standards - unlike legally sanctioned mines, which are supposed to monitor methane, oxygen and coal dust levels. Although there is no data on the number of accidents and deaths in kopankas, Ukraine is said to have the second highest mining fatality rate in the world, only behind China. [Al Jazeera](#)

[top of page...](#)

USNORTHCOM

Canada, U.S.: NHL mumps outbreak grows with Sidney Crosby diagnosis

15 December - Sidney Crosby became the latest National Hockey League player to receive a positive diagnosis for mumps in an unusual outbreak of the disease which is typically prevented by vaccination. ... The mumps outbreak, which has infected at least 13 NHL players and two referees, is odd given that most U.S. residents receive a vaccine for the disease, which causes headache, fever and swelling of the salivary glands. Crosby reportedly received a vaccination for the disease as recently as this February, according to the Penguins. Still, doctors say that the effectiveness of the vaccine can wear off over time, and hockey players may be particularly susceptible to the disease given the exchange of saliva during heavy hits. [Time](#)

U.S.: Abuse of synthetic drugs declines across U.S.

16 December - Use of synthetic drugs, like bath salts, by young people continues to decline across the nation, according to a study by the University of Michigan. ... And a few more results from that Monitoring the Future study. Alcohol use among teens is at its lowest point since the survey began in 1975, and the use of illicit drugs is also declining. Fewer teens report taking ecstasy, synthetic marijuana and hallucinogenic mushrooms than in previous years. ... There's also been a steep drop in the use of drugs known as bath salts. ... [Mary] Elliott says media coverage of the shocking behaviors exhibited by bath salts users

helped steer teenagers away from the drug. Use of synthetic drugs, including bath salts, started falling nationwide in 2012, a trend that continued this year, according to the University of Michigan's annual Monitoring the Future report. [NPR](#)

U.S.: CDC reports 28 more EV-D68 cases, 1 polio-like illness

12 December - After several weeks with no new reports of enterovirus D68 (EV-D68) respiratory infections, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported 28 more illnesses, raising the national count since August to 1,149 cases in 48 states and Washington, DC. But an official said the agency is not aware of any new case clusters. In addition, the agency has identified one more case of acute flaccid myelitis (AFM), a polio-like illness that involves unexplained limb weakness in children and seems related to EV-D68. The new AFM count is 94 cases in 33 states. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

U.S.: CDC - The 10 most critical public-health missions, challenges of 2014

16 December - Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has released a review of its responses to what the agency says are the 10 most important public-health missions and challenges of 2014. ...

Mission: New Infectious Disease Threats

1. Ebola. With 170 staff in the field and more than 700 people working on Ebola at any one time, CDC's response to the ongoing Ebola outbreak in West Africa is the largest in the agency's history.
2. Antibiotic resistance.
3. Enterovirus D-68.
4. Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), a new viral respiratory illness that was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012, showed a dramatic increase in cases during 2014.

Mission: Continued Fight against Infectious Diseases

5. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to be one of the world's most important public health challenges, the CDC said. CDC is a primary partner in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which provides support to more than 60 countries to build capacity for their national HIV/AIDS programs.
6. Polio. The world is on the brink of eliminating polio, but we risk losing hard-won ground, the CDC said.

Mission: Laboratory safety

7. Laboratory safety. Laboratory incidents during 2014 raised national awareness of the importance of laboratory safety.

Mission: Leading Causes of Death

8. Cardiovascular diseases.

9. Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States.

10. Fatal overdose. A silent epidemic of fatal overdose kills 44 people every day in the US, the CDC said. [Atlanta Business Chronicle](#)

U.S.: Citing health risks, Cuomo bans fracking in New York State

17 December - Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's administration announced on Wednesday that it would ban hydraulic fracturing in New York State because of concerns over health risks, ending years of debate over a method of extracting natural gas. ... In a presentation at the cabinet meeting, the acting state health commissioner, Dr. Howard A. Zucker, said the examination had found "significant public health risks" associated with fracking. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: FDA approves blood test that gauges heart attack risk

15 December - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Monday approved a new blood test that can help determine a person's future odds for heart attack and other heart troubles. The test is designed for people with no history of heart disease, and it appears to be especially useful for women, and black women in particular, the agency said. "A cardiac test that helps better predict future coronary heart disease risk in women, and especially black women, may help health care professionals identify these patients before they experience a serious [heart disease] event, like a heart attack," Alberto Gutierrez, director of the Office of In Vitro Diagnostics and Radiological Health in the FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health, said in an agency news release. [Medline Plus](#)

U.S.: FDA approves device to remove some pathogens from donated plasma

17 December - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the Intercept Blood System, a device that blood banks can use to remove some pathogens from plasma donations. ... Intercept uses a photochemical process involving ultraviolet light and the chemical amotosalen to inactivate pathogens. The device can be used on plasma obtained from whole blood and plasma obtained by apheresis. Intercept's manufacturer, Cerus Corp., said that blood banks can use the process on site to inactivate viruses like HIV, hepatitis B and C, and West Nile virus. Other pathogens, such as human parvovirus B19 and some bacterial spores, however, remain active following the photochemical treatment. The device is being tested in clinical trials in West Africa and at Emory University to inactivate potential pathogens such as HIV and malaria in plasma donations from Ebola survivors. The goal is to

make antibody-containing plasma safe and available for Ebola patients, the *New York Times* reported. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

U.S.: Murthy confirmed as Surgeon General

16 December - By a vote of 51-43, the Senate Monday confirmed Vivek Murthy, MD, as Surgeon General, with opponents arguing he was unqualified for the job, while supporters asserted that opposition to the nomination stemmed mostly from Murthy's past remarks on gun violence. [MedPage Today](#)

U.S. report: Syphilis spikes among sexually transmitted diseases

16 December - Syphilis is rapidly spreading among gay and bisexual men in the United States, leading to the highest new case numbers reported in two decades, while other common sexually transmitted diseases appear to be under control, a federal study found on Tuesday. In 2013, the number of syphilis infections reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention rose by more than 10 percent to 17,535 cases, according to the agency's annual report card on diseases commonly spread through sexual contact. That is the most syphilis cases since 1995, the CDC said, with men having sex with men accounting for 75 percent of infections. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Syphilis test gets OK for wider use

15 December - A fingerstick blood test for syphilis is simple enough that untrained healthcare workers can use it outside of traditional laboratories, the FDA has ruled. The agency approved the so-called Syphilis Health Check test in 2011 and categorized the assay under its Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) rules as moderate- and high-complexity, meaning it could only be performed in a lab qualified at that level. The FDA said today it would waive that requirement, making it possible for the test to be used in physicians' offices, emergency rooms, maternity wards, other healthcare facilities, and a range of other sites. [MedPage Today](#)

[top of page...](#)

USPACOM

Indonesia: Rescue efforts stopped by heavy rain following deadly mudslide



15 December - On Monday afternoon local time, officials from the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB) said the death toll for a large landslide in central Indonesia was up to 51. Another 57 residents were still unaccounted for. They also report that over 2,000 personnel are contributing to the

search. The landslide occurred late on Friday in the village of Sampang, which is centrally located on the island of Java several hundred miles to the east-southeast of Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. The landslide buried more than 100 homes. Search and rescue efforts were put on hold Monday as heavy rain returned to the area, making it unsafe due to fears of additional mudslides. [AccuWeather.com](#)

Thailand: Ministry of Public Health tries to tackle teenage pregnancy

14 December - Thailand's Ministry of Public Health is taking serious action against the problem of teenage pregnancy which has been rising fast in the last ten years. During a visit to Buriram's hospital on Saturday, Prof. Dr. Rachata Rachatanavin, the Minister for Public Health unveiled a plan to develop teen clinics in hospitals under the ministry. ... While keeping secret the names of teens who are pregnant, the clinic should cooperate with their families and schools to sort out the problem. According to the Public Health Ministry, Thailand's teenage pregnancy rate is high when compared to other Southeast Asian countries. Even though the nation's overall birthrate has been gradually dropping, the rate of teen births is rising rapidly. In the past ten years, more than a million children were born to mothers who were aged 15 to 19. [Chiangrai Times](#)

[top of page...](#)

USSOUTHCOM

Brazil: West Nile virus

On 9 December 2014, the Ministry of Health of Brazil reported a case of West Nile Virus (WNV) in the state of Piauí (PI). This is the first detection of a human case of WNV infection in Brazil. The case has been under investigation since August 2014, when the patient had the first symptoms. The infection was laboratory-confirmed on 28 November 2014. The

case, who was admitted to hospital in Teresina (PI), has been discharged and will undergo rehabilitation and physical therapy to recover. [WHO](#)

Caribbean chikungunya outbreak surpasses 1 million cases

15 December - The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) reported 38,042 new chikungunya cases in the Caribbean and Americas on Dec 12, bringing the outbreak total to 1,034,926. The total includes 1,012,347 suspected and 20,209 confirmed locally acquired cases and 2,370 imported cases. The US Virgin Islands reported its second death since the Dec 5 report, bringing the outbreak fatality total to 155. Bermuda reported its first 10 cases, 3 of which were confirmed. The largest case increase occurred in the Dominican Republic, which reported 25,381 cases, bringing its total to 524,381. Case numbers in Colombia continue to rise; the country reported 6,389 new cases this week, bringing its outbreak total to 45,890. Venezuela, which experienced a steep case increase at the start of December, reported no new cases. Brazil reported 1,956 new cases, and the Cayman Islands reported 160 new cases; both countries previously had reported low case numbers of 210 and 28 cases, respectively. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

[top of page...](#)

[U.S. Military](#) | [Global](#) | [Influenza](#) | [Veterinary/Food Safety](#) | [Wellness](#) | [Contact Us](#)

[USAFRICOM](#) | [USCENTCOM](#) | [USEUCOM](#) | [USNORTHCOM](#) | [USPACOM](#) | [USSOUTHCOM](#)

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