

20 December 2013

# Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



The Army Public Health Update is a collection of articles taken verbatim from public sources to offer awareness of current health issues and the media coverage given to them. The articles do not necessarily represent US Army Medical Department opinions, views, policy, or guidance, and should not be construed or interpreted as being endorsed by the US Army Medical Department.

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## NOTICE

Because of the  
Wednesday holidays,  
publication of the  
APH Weekly Update will  
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10 January 2014.



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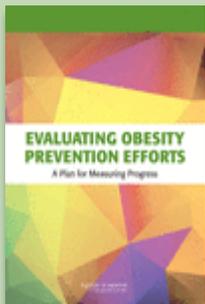
### USSOUTHCOM

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## Evaluating Obesity Prevention Efforts: A Plan for Measuring Progress

*Evaluating Obesity Prevention Efforts* develops a concise and actionable plan for measuring the nation's progress in obesity prevention efforts-- specifically, the success of policy and environmental strategies. This book offers a framework that will provide guidance for systematic and routine planning, implementation, and evaluation of the advancement of obesity prevention efforts.



## U.S. MILITARY

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### Brain Bank to revolutionize study of traumatic brain injury in Service members

16 December - The Defense Department this year advanced the study and treatment of traumatic brain injury in service members by creating the world's first human brain tissue repository for military personnel. Based at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., the Center for Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine Brain Tissue Repository was established with a grant from the Army Medical Research and Materiel Command. [MHS](#)

### Breaking the silence

14 December - ...The outrage over sexual assault in the military has focused largely on female service members, and with reason: A woman in uniform is much likelier to be targeted than a man, Pentagon surveys indicate. But because male service members greatly outnumber females, officials believe the majority of sexual assault victims — 53 percent in 2012 — are men. These men — an estimated 13,900 last year alone — are far less likely than women to report an attack. Only 13 percent of reports last year were filed by men, military data show. But the disparities do not end there. The Sun found that when men do report a sexual assault, military authorities are less likely to identify a suspect, to refer charges to court-martial or to discharge the perpetrator than in cases in which the victim is a woman. [Baltimore Sun](#)

### Marines who suffered brain injuries doubled risk of PTSD, study finds

12 December - Up to a fifth of U.S. service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have come home with a blast-related concussion or post-traumatic stress disorder — or both. A study published Wednesday in the journal *JAMA Psychiatry* helps detail the relationship between the two conditions. Marines who suffered mild traumatic brain injuries while deployed were roughly twice as likely to get PTSD, researchers found. One likely explanation is that the bomb blasts, the most common cause of brain injuries during the wars, are psychologically traumatizing as well. In addition, structural changes in the brain after a head injury may increase the likelihood of developing PTSD and decrease the chances of recovery, said Dr. Dewleen Baker, a co-author of the study and research director at the Veterans Affairs Center of Excellence for Stress and Mental Health in San Diego. [Science Now](#)

### New military resiliency training coming soon?

15 December - The next generation of military resiliency training may have arrived. A class of 46 sergeants and staff sergeants at Camp Lejeune, N.C., participated in a five-day pilot program for Marine 360, an intensive military resiliency course that encompasses such

## Worldometers

Real time statistics on population, public healthcare expenditures, food, water, health and more.



## 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.

topics as combat stress, sleeping habits and sexual health. It emphasizes open-ended discussions and hands-on workshops... The program, headed by retired Army Col. Mary Lopez, began in Grafenwoehr, Germany, as "Soldier 360" and has served more than 1,200 Army noncommissioned officers there, at Fort Bragg, N.C., and at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. It made its way to Camp Lejeune through a sponsorship by the USO of North Carolina... Marine 360 features relaxation, health and fitness practices, including yoga, acupuncture and hypnosis. [Army Times](#)

## New rule could aid veterans' access to health care for some traumatic injuries

16 December - The Department of Veterans Affairs has approved new regulations to make it easier for veterans to receive health care and compensation for certain illnesses, including Parkinsonism, dementia, and depression, which have been linked to traumatic brain injury. The final rules, which will be published on Tuesday in the Federal Register, also add to the list unprovoked seizures and hormone deficiency diseases related to the hypothalamus, pituitary or adrenal glands. The new policy, which takes effect on Jan. 16, could pave the way for thousands of veterans to file claims. [New York Times](#)

## Report: New trash incinerators in Afghanistan never used by U.S.

16 December - The U.S. paid \$5.4 million for two never-used trash incinerators at Forward Operating Base Sharana in eastern Afghanistan, potentially exposing troops to hazardous fumes from open-air burn pits used to dispose of waste instead. In a report released Monday, John Spoko, the Special Inspector General For Afghanistan Reconstruction, said the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers accepted the facility built by a Denver-based contractor in December 2012 — more than two years after it was supposed to be finished — without conducting any safety inspections. The contractor who would have operated the incinerators found they had \$1 million worth of electrical safety issues that posed a hazard to workers... The Veterans Affairs Department is establishing a registry of affected troops to study the extent of the health consequences of open-air burn pits. [Army Times](#)

## Surveillance snapshot: Bacterial meningitis among beneficiaries of the Military Health System, 1998-2013

November 2013 - From 1998 to 2013 (partial year), 3,782 beneficiaries of the Military Health System (MHS) were diagnosed as cases of bacterial meningitis... In active and Reserve/Guard component service members, meningococcal meningitis was the most commonly documented specified type of bacterial meningitis. Among all other beneficiaries (e.g., spouses, children, retirees, etc.) streptococcal meningitis was the most commonly specified type of bacterial meningitis. Meningococcal meningitis was diagnosed among 91 active component service members, 14 Reserve/Guard service members, and 251 other beneficiaries. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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## What happens in the brain after a concussion

18 December - ...In the case of concussion, the body mounted a brave repair campaign, sending specialized immune cells from the blood and the brain to patch and fill in the frayed membranes. But the process was too slow, allowing an excess of free radicals to pass through the weakened membranes and migrate into the brain tissue, where they soon caused the death of brain cells far from the original impact site. While concerning, this development also suggested to the scientists the possibility of treatment. If they could reduce the number of free radicals clustering near the brain, they reasoned, they could lessen the subsequent damage. So, in follow-up experiments, they inserted large amounts of a powerful antioxidant into the space between the animals' skull and brain. Antioxidants soak up free radicals and, it turned out, dramatically blunted the trauma associated with impacts to the brain. In animals that received the treatment immediately after a concussion, almost 70 percent fewer brain cells died than in untreated mice. [New York Times](#)

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## GLOBAL

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### FAO: Animal to human disease more likely



16 December - About 70 percent of the new diseases that have infected humans in recent decades have come from animals. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization warns it's getting easier for diseases to make that jump as the population and food-supply chains grow. The FAO has released a new reported called "World Livestock

2013: Changing Disease Landscapes." It says those landscapes have become "vastly more complicated" by human activity. "I think that if we continue the state of play, we'll only see more diseases emerge – more natural resources disappear – and more threats to the human health into the food chain," said Juan Lubroth, the agency's chief veterinary officer. [VOA](#)

### Fungus could control mosquitoes, research suggests

17 December - Fungus *Metarhizium anisopliae* lives in soil and kills a whole range of insects and researchers say it also affects mosquito larvae if added to the water where the insect breeds... The team at Swansea University's department of bioscience said initial trials are very promising. "The fungus occurs in soil and kills a whole range of insects but we've put it in the water where mosquito larvae breed and it is ingested by the insect and they die," team member Professor Tariq Butt told BBC Radio Wales... Also, it's quite nice that

we're killing three of the major species of mosquito transmitting a whole range of diseases." [BBC News](#)

## The perfect storm of information: Combining traditional and non-traditional data sources for public health situational awareness during hurricane response

16 December - ...[T]he Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) must have situational awareness to prepare for and address state and local requests for assistance following hurricanes. Both traditional and non-traditional data have been used to improve situational awareness in fields like disease surveillance and seismology. ...[T]his study shows that non-traditional data sources should augment traditional data sources and can fill some of the gaps in traditional reporting. During a hurricane response where early event detection can save lives and reduce morbidity, tweets can provide a source of information for early warning. In times of limited budgets, investing technical and personnel resources to efficiently and effectively gather, curate, and analyze non-traditional data for improved situational awareness can yield a high return on investment.

[PLOS](#)

## Twin U.S. studies unlock mystery of how HIV causes AIDS

19 December - U.S. scientists have discovered the basic mechanisms that allow HIV to wipe out the body's immune system and cause AIDS, which could lead to new approaches to treatment and research for a cure for the disease that affects 35 million people around the world. Instead of actively killing immune system cells known as CD4 T cells, much of the damage done by HIV occurs when the virus tries to invade these cells and fails, triggering an innate immune response that causes the cells to self-destruct in a fiery kind of cell suicide known as pyroptosis. [Reuters](#)

## UN warns of hazards of electronic waste

15 December - The United Nations predicts that the amount of electronic waste disposed of annually worldwide will surge 33 percent by 2017. The U.N.'s "[Solving the E-Waste Problem](#)" initiative issued a report Sunday saying that the weight of electronic goods discarded every year worldwide would rise to 65.4 million metric tons by 2017, with most of the growth coming from developing nations. The alliance of U.N. organizations, grassroots groups and industry said China had the highest volume of electrical goods put on the market last year, with the U.S. ranking second. Taken together developing and emerging countries already produce as much e-waste as the developed world. [VOA](#)

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## INFLUENZA

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### Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

- During week 49 (ending 13 December 2013), influenza-like-illness (ILI) and pneumonia and influenza (P&I) increased in NORTHCOM, EUCOM and PACOM.
- The percent of outpatient encounters due to ILI was elevated when compared to previous seasons in NORTHCOM and EUCOM.
- Among training centers in week 48, influenza rates remain at or below expected values. There were no cases reported for week 49.
- The influenza vaccination coverage for the DoD (active duty component only) is 92% (as of 11 December 2013). [AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

### CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 49 (December 1-7, 2013), influenza activity continued to increase in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 6,219 specimens tested and reported by U.S. World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories during week 49, 830 (13.3%) 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: No influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.
- Influenza-associated Hospitalizations: A cumulative rate for the season of 2.0 laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations per 100,000 population was reported. [FluView](#)

### DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During Weeks 48 & 49 (24 November - 7 December 2013), 76 specimens were collected and received from 32 locations. Results were finalized for 63 specimens from 27 locations. For specimens collected during Week 48, there were five influenza A(H1N1)pdm09. For specimens collected during Week 49, there were four influenza A(H1N1)pdm09.
- Cumulative results were finalized for 493 specimens from 62 locations. There were 28 specimens positive for influenza (22 A(H1N1)pdm09, five A(H3N2), one

A(H1N1)pdm09 & rhinovirus/enterovirus, and five B/unknown lineage). Other respiratory pathogens identified were 13 adenovirus, six *Chlamydomphila pneumoniae*, five coronavirus, eight human metapneumovirus, 26 *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*, 40 parainfluenza, 15 RSV, and 121 rhinovirus/enterovirus.

- During Week 49, there was one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 associated death, among specimens submitted, in a retired service member. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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

For week 49/2013:

- All 29 reporting countries recorded low-intensity influenza activity.
- Of 428 sentinel specimens tested across 24 countries, 13 (3%) were positive for influenza viruses.
- Eight hospitalised laboratory-confirmed influenza cases were reported by four countries.

Since the start of the 2013–2014 influenza surveillance period in week 40/2013, there has been no evidence of sustained influenza activity in Europe, even though the percentage of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza virus has increased in some countries.

[Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

## Google.org: Flu Trends

19 December – Estimates of flu activity based on certain Internet search queries indicate that the level of flu activity in the northern hemisphere ranges from minimal in Bulgaria to high in Mexico and in the southern hemisphere ranges from minimal to low. [Google.org Flu Trends](#)

## Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 14 December 2013:

- Influenza: Six cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (4 A/H1N1 and 2 B) among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at NRTC Great Lakes and Fort Benning. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

## Texas health officials probe severe flu-like illness cluster

18 December - Health officials in Montgomery County, Tex., are investigating an outbreak of an influenza-like illness that has so far hospitalized eight people with severe infections,

four of them fatal... Texas and a handful of other southern states have been the nation's flu hot spots so far, according to the latest surveillance reports from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Nationally, flu activity registered a modest jump, and the 2009 H1N1 has been the most common among subtyped strains, according to the CDC's most recent report. Mark Escott, MD, the MCHD's medical director, said... that health officials are seeing an unusual pattern of serious illnesses, with patients having symptoms similar to flu, such as fever, sore throat, body aches, and fatigue. The eight patients have had complications such as pneumonia, which is expected in severe flu cases, he said. [CIDRAP](#)

## USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 7 December 2013 (Week 49), overall influenza activity continues to steadily increase in both Army and civilian populations. Currently the Southeast region of the U.S. reports higher influenza-like illness (ILI) than other regions.

ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 49 were 27% lower than for the same week last year.

Influenza cases: Two hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in week 49. To date, 11 cases have been reported during this influenza season: 2 in AD SMs and 9 in non-AD beneficiaries.

Viral specimens: During week 49, 185 of 825 (22%) laboratory specimens tested were positive for respiratory pathogens. More specimens were positive for Influenza A (59%) than for RSV (30%). The majority of influenza A-positive specimens were submitted by MTFs in SRMC.

Army Vaccination Rates: Army (COMPO 1) compliance in week 49: MEDCOM 98%, FORSCOM 96%, TRADOC 92%, AMC 92%, IMCOM 84%, USASOC 83%. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

## PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

### Avian influenza A (H7N9) virus

12 December - Human infections with a new avian influenza A (H7N9) virus were first reported in China in March 2013. Most of these infections are believed to result from exposure to infected poultry or contaminated environments, as H7N9 viruses have also been found in poultry in China. While some mild illnesses in human H7N9 cases have been seen, most patients have had severe respiratory illness, with about one-third resulting in death. No evidence of sustained person-to-person spread of H7N9 has been found, though some evidence points to limited person-to-person spread in rare circumstances. No cases of H7N9 outside of China have been reported. The new H7N9 virus has not been detected in people or birds in the United States... [S]ince the beginning of October, WHO

and China have reported more new H7N9 cases in China per month relative to the summer months, including two cases reported by Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of People's Republic of China in early December. These recent cases coincide with the arrival of cooler weather in China and are not unexpected. [CDC](#)

## China reports first human case of H10N8 avian flu

17 December - A 73-year-old woman in Jiangxi province in China has died from an H10N8 avian flu infection, Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection (CHP) said today, the first report of that strain infecting humans. The woman, whose immune system was compromised, had an underlying illness and had visited a live-poultry market, CHP reported in a statement. She was admitted to a local hospital on Nov 30, was diagnosed as having severe pneumonia, and died Dec 6... "Influenza A(H10) is currently not a local statutorily notifiable infectious disease but the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the CHP is capable of detecting this virus by culture or genetic testing. No confirmed human cases have been recorded so far in Hong Kong," a spokesman for the CHP said in the statement. [CIDRAP](#)

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### **VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY**

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## Nearly identical MERS-CoV strains found in camels, humans

16 December - Researchers today reported that dromedary camels on a farm in Qatar were infected with a strain of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) nearly identical to that found in two people associated with the farm. The findings point to an outbreak that involved both camels and humans, but they don't answer the key question of whether camels infected humans or the other way around. Qatari health officials announced Nov 27 that the virus had been found in camels on the farm. Today's report in the *Lancet Infectious Diseases* spells out the science behind the announcement and says the findings mark the first definitive confirmation of the virus in camels. [CIDRAP](#)

## Outbreak of Staphylococcal food poisoning from a military unit lunch party — United States, July 2012

20 December - On July 30, 2012, the emergency department at a military hospital was visited by 13 persons seeking care for gastrointestinal illness with onset 2–3 hours after a work lunch party... An immediate outbreak investigation was conducted by local military public health personnel with assistance from CDC. Initial epidemiologic analysis implicated "perlo" (a chicken, sausage, and rice dish) and bacterial intoxication as the outbreak

mechanism. This enabled public health personnel to 1) recommend no further consumption of perlo and 2) reassure appropriate authorities that no additional ill persons likely would be seeking care and advise that nothing more than supportive care of ill persons likely would be required. After interviewing party attendees, investigators found nine additional persons who met their case definition. Subsequent CDC laboratory analysis of a sample of perlo detected staphylococcal enterotoxin A, supporting the epidemiologic findings. Improper food handling and preparation measures were identified and addressed by the appropriate authorities, who provided additional detailed education on food preparation safety for the persons who prepared the meal. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

## Study: Raw milk outbreaks only tip of iceberg



18 December - Illness outbreaks that are blamed on raw milk are only the tip of a big iceberg, because non-outbreak (sporadic) cases may outnumber them by 25 to 1, according to estimates based on 10 years' worth of foodborne illness surveillance data in Minnesota. Researchers at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) found that 3.7% of patients who had sporadic intestinal illnesses between 2001 and 2010 reported drinking raw milk in the week or two before they got sick.

There were 530 such cases, compared with 21 cases that were part of known raw milk-related outbreaks. Given how many enteric illness cases go undetected for each one that's reported, more than 20,000 Minnesotans may have had raw milk-related illnesses in the decade in question, according to the study, published yesterday in *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. [CIDRAP](#)

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### WELLNESS

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## Being overweight may affect men's semen quality

18 December - Overweight and obese men in a new study showed diminished quantity and quality of semen, suggesting that a weight problem might also affect fertility, researchers say... Dr. Michael Eisenberg, of Stanford University School of Medicine in California, and his colleagues recruited 468 couples in Texas and Michigan who were planning to conceive a child and tested several aspects of the men's semen. They also weighed the men and measured their waists and found that greater waist circumference and body mass index (BMI) - a measure of weight relative to height - were both linked to lower ejaculate volume. [Reuters](#)

## Father's diet before conception plays crucial role in health of his offspring, study suggests

10 December - ...[A] study led by McGill researcher Sarah Kimmins suggests that the father's diet before conception plays crucial role in health of his offspring. It also raises concerns about the long-term effects of current Western diets and of food insecurity. The research focused on vitamin B9, also called folate... Now research from the Kimmins group shows for the first time that the father's folate levels may be just as important to the development and health of their offspring as are those of the mother. [Medical Xpress](#)

## Increasing marijuana use in high school is reported

18 December - A new federal report shows that the percentage of American high school students who smoke marijuana is slowly rising, while the use of alcohol and almost every other drug is falling. The report raises concerns that the relaxation of restrictions on marijuana, which can now be sold legally in 20 states and the District of Columbia, has been influencing use of the drug among teenagers. Health officials are concerned by the steady increase and point to what they say is a growing body of evidence that adolescent brains, which are still developing, are susceptible to subtle changes caused by marijuana... Experts debate the extent to which heavy marijuana use may cause lasting detriment to the brain. But Dr. Volkow said that one way marijuana might affect cognitive function in adolescents was by disrupting the normal development of white matter through which cells in the brain communicate.

[New York Times](#)

## Herpes viruses associated with cognitive impairment

6 December - The herpes virus that produces cold sores during times of stress now has been linked to cognitive impairment throughout life, according to a new University of Michigan study that for the first time shows an impact on children ages 12-16... HSV-1 is the oral herpes virus. Previous research has linked it with neurological disorders associated with aging, including Alzheimer's disease and dementia, but few studies have examined whether these pathogens may influence cognition beginning early in life... The research, published in the Journal of Infectious Diseases, demonstrates that HSV-1 is associated with lower reading and spatial reasoning test scores among children ages 12-16; impaired coding speed, which is a measure of visual motor speed and attention, among middle-aged adults; and immediate memory impairment in older adults. CMV also was associated with impairment in coding speed, learning and recall in middle-aged adults. [Medical Xpress](#)

## Hypertension guidelines can be eased, panel says

18 December - New guidelines suggest that people over 60 can have a higher blood pressure than previously recommended before starting treatment, in a shift from goals that have been in place for more than 30 years. Until now, people were told to strive for

blood pressures below 140/90, with some taking multiple drugs to achieve that goal. But the guidelines committee, which spent five years reviewing evidence, concluded that the goal for people over 60 should be a systolic pressure of less than 150. And the diastolic goal should remain less than 90. [New York Times](#)

## Music and the young brain

16 December - Many experts and parents believe that exposing preschoolers to music “makes them smarter” — that is, gives them an advantage in cognitive development in other areas. But two new randomized trials have found no evidence for the belief... “We should be very cautious in making positive claims about cognitive benefits of music lessons,” said the lead author, Samuel A. Mehr, a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He added, “We should teach music because music is important.” [New York Times](#)

## Skip the supplements



14 December – ...The Joint Commission, which is responsible for hospital accreditation in the United States, requires that dietary supplements be treated like drugs. It makes sense: Vitamins, amino acids, herbs, minerals and other botanicals have pharmacological effects. So they are drugs. But the Food and Drug Administration doesn’t regulate dietary supplements as drugs — they aren’t tested for safety and efficacy before they’re sold. Many aren’t made according to minimal standards of manufacturing... And many are mislabeled, accidentally or intentionally... The F.D.A. estimates that approximately 50,000 adverse reactions to dietary supplements occur every year. And yet few consumers know this... Our hospital has acted to protect the safety of our patients. No longer will we administer dietary supplements unless the manufacturer provides a third-party written guarantee that the product is made under the F.D.A.’s “good manufacturing practice” (G.M.P.) conditions, as well as a Certificate of Analysis (C.O.A.) assuring that what is written on the label is what’s in the bottle. [New York Times](#)

## Study finds new link between obesity, early decline in kidney function

13 December - A new UCSF-led study of nearly 3,000 individuals links obesity to the development of kidney disease. The work also shows that, when properly measured, declines in kidney function are detectable long before the emergence of other obesity-related diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure... [P]articipants included in the study were categorized according to four ranges of body mass index (BMI): normal weight, overweight, obese, and extremely obese. At the beginning of the time period studied, the patients averaged 35 years of age and all had normal kidney function in the normal range, though higher-BMI patients were at the lower end of that range. Kidney function

diminished over time in all participants, but the decline was significantly greater and more rapid in heavier patients, and appeared to stem exclusively from BMI. [Medical Xpress](#)

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#### **USAFRICOM**

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## **Kenya: HIV treatment keeps a family together and growing**

18 December – [T]imes have changed in Kenya in the past few years. In particular, HIV drugs are now vastly more accessible in the country, in large part because of a U.S.-funded initiative aimed at fighting AIDS around the world. Over the past decade, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, has invested billions of dollars to treat HIV-positive people in developing countries. In 2013, the initiative spent \$529 million in Kenya alone... "What we've learned is that treatment is effective prevention," says Dr. Kevin De Cock, who directs the global health program at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As long as an HIV-positive person suppresses the virus in their immune system with medication, De Cock says, he or she has little chance of spreading the disease — even through unprotected sex. "We know that the risk of transmission is infinitesimally small," he says. [NPR](#)

## **Nigeria: Uncertainty as doctors begin five-day warning strike**

18 December - Doctors under the auspices of the Nigerian Medical Association, NMA, yesterday, withdraw their services from public hospitals across the federation. The phased warning strike, which is to protest failure of Federal Government to implement a mutual agreement to meet demands for improved welfare and other emoluments, will be called off in the first instance after five days. It is expected to continue after the yuletide season in the second phase, barring any progressive development on the crisis. [AllAfrica](#)

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#### **USCENTCOM**

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## **Pakistan: Three killed in separate polio shootings**

13 December - Gunmen have shot dead at least two policemen providing security to a team of polio workers in north-west Pakistan. A polio worker was also killed in a separate attack, local media have reported. The two policemen were travelling from the town of

Swabi to Topi by motorbike when they were attacked. The polio worker was shot on the outskirts of Peshawar. The attacks are the latest in a series targeting polio teams in the country. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but the Taliban oppose the polio vaccination schemes, which they see as a cover for international espionage. [BBC News](#)

## Saudi Arabia: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) – WHO update

17 December - WHO has been informed of an additional two laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in Saudi Arabia...Globally, from September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a total of 165 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including 71 deaths. [WHO](#)

## Syria conflict: Aleppo strikes 'overwhelm' hospitals



17 December - Hospitals in the Syrian city of Aleppo have been overwhelmed with casualties after a wave of air strikes which killed more than 100 people in recent days, Medecins Sans Frontieres says. Indiscriminate and sustained attacks by government aircraft had caused significant damage in areas populated by civilians, the organisation warned. Bodies are being lined up in front of hospitals for collection by relatives... On Sunday, 76 people, including 28 children, died when barrel bombs were dropped on three eastern areas, the group said. [BBC News](#)

## Syria region where polio found excluded from 2012 vaccination drive

17 December - The Syrian government excluded the largely rebel-held province of Deir al-Zor - where polio broke out this year - from a 2012 vaccination campaign, arguing that most residents had fled although hundreds of thousands were still there, a Reuters investigation shows. Public health researchers say missing out the Syrian province contributed to the reemergence there of polio, a highly infectious, incurable disease that can paralyze a child within hours but has been wiped out in many parts of the world. In November, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said 13 cases had been found in the province. Two more have since been recorded there and the virus has surfaced in Aleppo city and near Damascus, the first outbreak since 1999 in [Syria](#), where civil war has raged since a crackdown on protests in 2011. [Reuters](#)

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## EU issues warning on potential health risk from insecticides

17 December - European health authorities warned on Tuesday that two insecticides, including a widely-used one made by Bayer, may affect the developing human brain and should be more tightly controlled to limit human exposure. The products - acetamiprid and imidacloprid - belong to popular class of insecticides called neonicotinoids, which have recently been in the spotlight due to links with plunging populations of bees. Imidacloprid is one of the most widely used insecticides in the world. The European Union voted in April to ban three neonicotinoids - including imidacloprid which is primarily manufactured by Bayer - for two years amid safety and environmental concerns. [Reuters](#)

## Russia: Spain: Is Spain on the verge of a public health-care crisis?



16 December – [F]ollowing austerity measures and a legislative change last year, the government will not provide any of the estimated 873.000 non-registered immigrants with non-emergency health care. This could create a vast public health crisis in the very near future, warn researchers at the London School of Hygiene and

Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). A paper published in The Lancet, a medical journal, on December 14th, sounded an alarm bell on the state of Spanish health care. So far European media attention has focused on the impact of austerity on health care in Greece, with reports of dramatic increases in HIV, mental illness, TB and the return of malaria. Greece made cuts two years earlier than Spain did, so their impact became evident sooner. But the situation in Spain is just as worrying, warns Helena Legido-Quigley of the LSHTM, who fears that if the government doesn't change course soon, similar outbreaks could very well happen in Spain. [Economist](#)

## United Kingdom: Self-harm 'four times more likely' in female prisoners

15 December - Self-harm is a serious issue for women in prison, who make up only 5% of the prison population but account for half of all self-harm incidents, say Oxford University researchers. According to a study in The Lancet, nearly a quarter of female prisoners cut, scratch or poison themselves. Self-harm was also found to be a strong risk factor for suicide in prison, particularly among men. Experts say more should be done to reduce self-harm rates in prisons. The Oxford research team looked at self-harm incidents in all prisons in England and Wales between 2004 and 2009. It found that 5% to 6% of male prisoners and 20% to 24% of female prisoners deliberately harmed themselves every year,

resulting in 20,000 to 25,000 incidents per year. This compared with a 0.6% rate among the UK's general population. [BBC News](#)

## United Kingdom: Right-to-die challenge reaches Supreme Court

16 December - Campaigners for the right to die are to have their arguments heard by the Supreme Court in the latest round of their legal battle. It involves family of the late Tony Nicklinson of Wilts, who had locked-in syndrome, and Paul Lamb of Leeds, who was paralysed in a road crash. They want the law changed so they can be allowed to die with the help of a doctor. Judgement is likely to be issued at a later date. The court will have to decide if the law prohibiting assisted suicide is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights by denying Mr Lamb, and others like him, the right to choose the timing of their death. [BBC News](#)

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## U.S., FDA: Anti-bacterial soaps may not curb bacteria



16 December - After more than 40 years of study, the federal government said Monday it has no evidence that the anti-bacterial chemicals used in countless common soaps and washes help prevent the spread of germs, and it is reviewing research suggesting they may pose health risks. Regulators at the Food and Drug Administration said they are revisiting the safety of chemicals such as triclosan in light of recent studies that suggest the substances can interfere with hormone levels and spur the growth of drug-resistant bacteria.

[Washington Post](#)

## U.S., Georgia: Possibly rabid cat sought in Fleming area

13 December - A Fleming couple and their two children are undergoing preventive treatment for rabies after the family dog tested positive for the disease, according to the Coastal Health District. The dog was not up-to-date on rabies vaccinations. In addition, the family reported its cat got away from their home. The potentially rabid cat was showing signs of aggression when it fled into the woods Wednesday near Cook Road, the owners said. Environmental-health officials and Liberty County Animal Control officers are trying to find the animal. [Bryan County News](#)

## U.S.: Infectious disease scorecard reveals state gaps, makes recommendations

17 December - Outdated information systems and budget cuts are among the problems that prevent the nation from doing a better job of preventing and controlling infectious disease outbreaks, according to detailed review today from two public health groups. The report from Trust for America's Health (TFAH) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) looked at key disease outbreak indicators for each state in finding gaps and overall themes that could improve the nation's detection and response capacities... [T]he indicators focus on public health funding levels, meeting vaccination targets, having a climate-change adaptation plan, mandates for reporting healthcare-associated infection (HAI) reporting, public health lab capacity, and routine HIV screening. A majority of states (34) scored 5 or lower on the key indicators, ranging from New Hampshire as the highest scoring at 8 to Georgia, Nebraska, and New Jersey, all tied for the lowest score of 2.

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## Fiji: Health Ministry monitors new strain of dengue fever

18 December - The Health Ministry is closely monitoring a new strain of dengue fever that has been identified as "Dengue 3". Acting National Advisor Communicable Diseases – Dr Mike Kama says suspicions of the new strain arose after an unusually high number of cases of dengue were recorded in the last month. The Health Ministry is awaiting results of blood tests and other data to confirm the strain. [Fiji Broadcasting Corporation](#)

## India: Hypothyroidism highly prevalent in India

19 December – Women were three times more likely to be affected by hypothyroidism than men (15.86 % as against 5.02 %), especially those in the 46-54 years age group, it said. Hypothyroidism, a common form of thyroid disorder, is highly prevalent in India with one out of 10 people in the country diagnosed with the condition, a new report said on Thursday... Hypothyroidism was found to be affecting 10.95% of the studied population in India. [dna](#)

## Philippines: Bringing the health response into focus



December 2013 - When Typhoon Haiyan tore through the central islands of the Philippines five weeks ago, killing over 6000 people, injuring some 26 000 and leaving 4 million others homeless, it also ravaged medical facilities across the region. In the weeks that followed, tireless Philippine health workers, buoyed by medical teams from around the country and the world, came to the aid of tens of thousands of survivors in a health response coordinated by the Philippine Department of Health and WHO. Through these images, WHO brings the emergency health response into focus and looks at the immense challenges ahead to sustain and expand critical health services and prevent disease, as the country's battered health system is restored. [WHO](#)

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## Chikungunya outbreak grows in Caribbean

18 December - Last week the World Health Organization reported two cases of chikungunya, a painful, mosquito-borne illness on the French part of St. Martin. Now the outbreak has grown to 10 cases, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Wednesday. And the outbreak is likely to get even bigger or spread to other islands... The outbreak in St. Martin is the first time chikungunya has been contracted in the Western Hemisphere. [NPR](#)

## Peru: Pneumonic plague

16 December - There are now 6 confirmed cases of pneumonic plague in La Libertad, as reported yesterday, 14 Dec 2013, by the regional manager of Health, Jose Evangelista Vargas. "We are waiting for the laboratory tests of 6 other people that were evaluated for some symptoms of infection with the plague bacillus, *Yersinia pestis*." One of the new infected is a worker in a funeral home." Of the confirmed cases, unfortunately one died: a 17 year old girl who lived in a sector of the town of Visnea Mocanera, in the district of Casa Grande, in the province of Ascope. The Health Authority explained that due to ignorance, the deceased with plague was taken from the morgue of the Regional Teaching Hospital in Trujillo (HRDT) and subsequently transferred to a funeral home, where a worker of the funeral home who manipulated the corpse was infected with the bacterium. A 68 year old woman and her husband are thought to have pneumonic plague in addition to a doctor who became infected when providing medical care to some of those cases. Of the 6 confirmed cases, 4 were in the province of Ascope, while a person contracted the plague

in the Regional Hospital and the other is of an unclear source. [ProMED-mail](#)

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