

21 June 2013

Army Public Health Weekly Update

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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Posters in Dari

Two posters have been translated into Dari, one on mosquito-borne disease and the other on rabies. The posters are available from the **Health Information Products eCatalog**.



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U.S. MILITARY

Are there 2 types of Gulf War illness?



14 June - U.S. veterans with Gulf War illness complain of different types of symptoms, and researchers now think they know why: There may be two distinct forms of the illness, depending on which areas of the brain have atrophied. "Our findings help explain and validate what these veterans have long said about their illness," said study lead author Rakib Rayhan, a Georgetown University Medical Center researcher. For the study, published online June 14 in the journal *PLoS One*, the research team conducted brain scans of 28 veterans with Gulf War illness before and after they underwent exercise stress tests. For 18 veterans, pain levels increased after exercise stress, and the scans showed a loss of brain matter in regions associated with pain regulation. [Medline Plus](#)

Military has schedule for women to move into combat jobs, including SEALs, other commandos

18 June - ...Under details the military laid out Tuesday, women could start training as Army Rangers by mid-2015 and as Navy SEALs a year later. U.S. Special Operations Command is coordinating the studies of what commando jobs could be opened to women, what exceptions might be requested and when the transition would take place. The proposals could mean that women are still excluded from some jobs if research and testing find that women could not be successful. But the services would have to defend such decisions to top Pentagon leaders... The military services have mapped out a schedule that includes reviewing and possibly changing the physical and mental requirements for certain infantry, armor, commando and other front-line positions across the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. Under the plans there would be one common requirement for men and women for each post, and it would be based on specific tasks troops need to do in order to perform those jobs. [Washington Post](#)

Using the tuberculosis cohort review to evaluate and improve the U.S. Army's tuberculosis control program

May 2013 - This is the first TB cohort review of experience of the U.S. military. The review demonstrates that TB treatment and control measures in the low-incidence setting of the U.S. Army compare well overall to national indicators and U.S. national averages. Delays in TB diagnosis can be addressed in multiple ways. Epidemiologic clues can be important in identifying patients at risk for TB, and the risk factors identified in this report should be shared with medical and public health providers. Chronic cough was the most common presenting symptom in this population... The most important component is developing administrative policies and procedures to ensure that the diagnosis of TB is considered in all appropriate settings. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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GLOBAL

Beyond NYC: Other places adapting to climate, too

16 June - From Bangkok to Miami, cities and coastal areas across the globe are already building or planning defenses to protect millions of people and key infrastructure from more powerful storm surges and other effects of global warming. Some are planning cities that will simply adapt to more water. But climate-proofing a city or coastline is expensive, as shown by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's \$20 billion plan to build floodwalls, levees and other defenses against rising seas. The most vulnerable places are those with the fewest resources to build such defenses, secure their water supplies or move people to higher ground. How to pay for such measures is a burning issue in U.N. climate talks, which just wrapped up a session in the German city of Bonn. [Yahoo! News](#)

Dangerous strains of E. coli may linger longer in water

14 June - ...A toxin dangerous to humans may help E. coli fend off aquatic predators, enabling strains of E. coli that produce the toxin to survive longer in lake water than benign counterparts, a new study finds. Researchers from the University at Buffalo and Mercyhurst University reported these results online 7 June in the journal *Applied and Environmental Microbiology*. "The take-home lesson is that E. coli that produce Shiga toxin persisted longer in recreational water than E. coli that don't produce this toxin," said UB Professor of Biological Sciences Gerald Koudelka, Ph.D., who led the study. "This is because the toxin appears to help E. coli resist predation by bacterial grazers." [Homeland Security News Wire](#)

Eye-tracking software may reveal autism and other brain disorders

18 June - The eyes of people with neurological conditions, including ADHD and Parkinson's, have a distinctive motion that could form the basis of clinical diagnosis... Years of research have found that our tiny, rapid eye movements called saccades serve as a window into the brain for psychologists... In a small, proof-of-concept study [researchers] found that their algorithm could classify mental disorders through eye-movement patterns: They identified elderly Parkinson's patients with nearly 90 percent accuracy as well as children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder with 77 percent accuracy. [Scientific American](#)

Investigation follows trail of a virus in hospitals

19 June - ...A detailed investigation of the viral illness first detected last year in Saudi Arabia has revealed the chilling ease with which the virus can spread to ill patients in the hospital — and its ability to infect some close contacts like hospital staff and family members who were in good health. A report on the investigation published Wednesday in *The New England Journal of Medicine* pinpointed the time it takes for a person to get sick after being exposed to the virus, a median of 5.2 days. The disease has now infected 64 people and

killed 38 in eight countries. Saudi Arabia has had the most cases. The United States has had none... [Dr. Alimuddin I. Zumla, an author of the study] said health experts would be increasingly concerned as the time nears for the annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca. "Four million pilgrims from 182 countries are coming to Saudi Arabia in two months' time," Dr. Zumla said. "I am worried, as a physician." [New York Times](#)

Maternal and paediatric tuberculosis still overlooked

18 June - The global target of a 50 percent reduction in tuberculosis (TB) by 2015 may already have been achieved, but TB remains a neglected disease among women and young children, say health experts. ...TB in expectant women increases the risk of birthing complications, including maternal death. According to WHO, maternal TB causes a two-fold increase in vaginal bleeding, eclampsia (pregnancy-induced hypertension), pre-eclampsia, and a 10-fold increase of miscarriage. Among newborns, maternal TB causes a two-fold increase in low birth weight and premature births (both risk factors for childhood death) and a six-fold increase of perinatal death (within the first 28 days of life). While the exact extent of the problem is still unknown, recent studies from sub-Saharan Africa and India have shown that TB was a direct cause of an estimated 6-15 percent of all maternal deaths and an indirect cause of 15-34 percent. [IRIN](#)

Researchers find anthrax reduces key blood vessel protein

17 June - Researchers at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration released findings on Friday that show the anthrax toxin reduces a key protein known for keeping the lining of blood vessels intact. ...A protein, called anthrax lethal toxin or LT, contributes to the symptoms of anthrax when the spores are inhaled. LT reduces the production of claudin-5, which is a molecule that keeps cells making tightly connected blood vessels. Without this connection, there is leakage of fluid from the blood. The researchers also found that this weakening of the blood vessels did not cause cell death. The data the researchers found could be used in the future to help make vaccines, drugs and diagnostics for anthrax and even other CBRN threats. [BioPrep Watch](#)

Scientists go medieval to solve ancient leprosy puzzle

14 June - ...Leprosy was so common in Europe during the Middle Ages that it's estimated 1 in 30 people was infected with the bacteria. But by the turn of the 16th century, after the crusades had swept across Europe, the disease mysteriously disappeared. And it never returned. This left scientists puzzled. Did the bacteria mutate to become less harmful, or did Europeans become resistant to the germs? To answer this question, a team of biologists and archaeologists probed the mass grave of a 600-year-old leper colony for traces of ancient leprosy DNA. They found leprosy didn't change, we did... Indeed, scientists believe that a certain gene makes some people highly resistant to leprosy. This particular gene, Cole says, is prevalent in Europeans. To stop a disease, Cole says, it's helpful to understand its origins. "Having information about the specific genes and proteins in the disease can help to determine preventative and therapeutic strategies, as well as possible drug resistances."

[NPR](#)

WHO urges tougher food marketing rules to curb childhood obesity



18 June - The **marketing** of unhealthy foods to children has proven "disastrously effective", driving obesity by using cheap social media channels to promote fat-, salt- and sugar-laden foods, the World Health Organisation's Europe office said on Tuesday. The **United Nations** health agency called for tighter controls on such **marketing**, saying tougher regulations were crucial to winning the fight against childhood obesity. **Reuters**

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INFLUENZA

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 23 ending June 8, 2013, 5.8% of all deaths reported through the 122-Cities Mortality Reporting System were due to pneumonia and influenza. This percentage was below the epidemic threshold of 6.8%. **FluView**

Google.org: Flu Trends

19 June – Estimates of flu activity based on certain Internet search queries indicate that the level of flu activity in the northern hemisphere ranges from minimal to low. In the southern hemisphere levels in Argentina are moderate and in Chile and South Africa, levels are high. **Google.org Flu Trends**

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 15 June 2013:

- Influenza: One case of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (B) among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were at or below expected values.
- NHRC has the capability to test for the novel H7N9 influenza virus. **NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update**

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

CDC steps down emergency operations for H7N9

18 June - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Jun 14 deactivated its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) response to the novel H7N9 flu outbreak in China, the agency said today in a Twitter post. However, the CDC said it would continue to watch the H7N9 virus closely, given that flu is known for its constant changes and evolution. The number of new H7N9 cases in China has tailed off since early May, and flu experts suspect that the warmer weather and poultry market closures may have played a role. [CIDRAP](#)

WHO puts H5N1 at 'alert' in pandemic phase system

18 June - Following the recent release of a new pandemic alert system, the World Health Organization (WHO) today posted a notice that said the current phase for H5N1 avian influenza is "alert," the second notch on its four-tiered system. The "alert" phase signifies that a new influenza subtype has been identified and increased vigilance and risk assessment are warranted. The WHO unveiled the new alert system, which is designed to focus more on disease risk than geographic spread, on Jun 10. [CIDRAP](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

China: Salmonella sickens hundreds of Chinese schoolchildren

18 June - At least 386 children in a Chinese province were hospitalized last week with suspected Salmonella infections, health officials announced Sunday. The students, who reside in the Meishan City area of Sichuan province, fell ill at the end of last week with symptoms of nausea, vomiting, fatigue and dizziness. Chinese health authorities eventually determined that their illnesses were caused by Salmonella. Over two-thirds of those sickened remained hospitalized as of Sunday, reported CNTV. [Food Safety News](#)

Low-income children face higher risk of foodborne illness, study says



19 June - Poorer nutrition and less access to healthcare leads to a greater likelihood of bacterial and viral infections — including foodborne illness — among low-income children, according to a [report](#) published Tuesday by the Consumer Federation of America. More than 2 out of every 5 children in the U.S. (44 percent) live in a low-income household, the report said, and studies show that

economic status is a greater predictor of risk than race or ethnicity when it comes to unintentional injuries. [Food Safety News](#)

U.S.: Illness count rises to 118 in frozen berry hepatitis A outbreak

18 June - At least 118 people in 8 western states are now known to be victims of a hepatitis A outbreak traced to a frozen berry mix sold at Costco. This count comes as the latest in an almost daily rise in the number of illnesses, which yesterday was at 106. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 47 of the victims have been hospitalized as a result of their infections. ...Of the 112 patients interviewed, 80 (71 percent) report eating "Townsend Farms Organic Anti-Oxidant Blend," a mix of frozen berries and pomegranate seeds sold at Costco stores, prior to falling ill. [Food Safety News](#)

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WELLNESS

AMA declares obesity a disease

18 June - The American Medical Assn. voted Tuesday to declare obesity a disease, a move that effectively defines 78 million American adults and 12 million children as having a medical condition requiring treatment. The nation's leading physicians organization took the vote after debating whether the action would do more to help affected patients get useful treatment or would further stigmatize a condition with many causes and few easy fixes... Tuesday's vote is certain to step up pressure on health insurance companies to reimburse physicians for the time-consuming task of discussing obesity's health risks with patients whose body mass index exceeds 30. It should also encourage doctors to direct these patients to weight-loss programs and to monitor their often-fitful progress. [Los Angeles Times](#)

A wearable alert to head injuries in sports

15 June - ...A crop of new lightweight devices that athletes can wear on the field may help people on sidelines keep better track of hits to players' heads during games and practice sessions. The devices, packed with sensors and microprocessors, register a blow to a player's skull and immediately signal the news by blinking brightly, or by sending a wireless alert. Athletes can wear the devices pressed tightly to their heads, held in place by a headband within a beanie, for example, or even by an adhesive patch and Velcro. Many of the systems are in research and development, but a few products are coming to the market this summer. [New York Times](#)

Big drop in HPV, vaccine gets credit

19 June - The prevalence of human papillomavirus (HPV) infection in young women has declined by more than half since the introduction of the HPV vaccine, despite low vaccine uptake, according to a study by the CDC. Compared with the 4 years prior to the vaccine's introduction, infection with the HPV strains covered by the vaccine decreased by 56% in 14- to 19-year-old girls in the first 4 years after the vaccine became available. The decline in HPV infection rate occurred despite the fact that only a third of eligible patients received the vaccine. HPV prevalence in other age groups did not differ significantly between the two time periods. [Medpage](#)

Blood tests could detect sexually-transmitted oral cancers

17 June - Antibodies to a high-risk type of a virus that causes mouth and throat cancers when transmitted via oral sex can be detected in blood tests many years before onset of the disease, according to a World Health Organisation-led team of researchers. In a study in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, the researchers said their findings may in future lead to people being screened for human papillomavirus (HPV) antibodies, giving doctors a chance to find those at high risk of oral cancers. [Reuters](#)

Bullying by siblings just as damaging, research finds

17 June - Bullying and aggressive behavior by a sibling can be as damaging as bullying by a classmate, neighbor or other peer, finds a new study that links it to increased depression, anxiety and anger among victimized kids and teens. And that association holds true for the various types of aggressive behavior studied, both mild and severe, from physical and psychological aggression to property victimization, researchers say. [USA Today](#)

Cheating ourselves of sleep

17 June - ...Research shows that most people require seven or eight hours of sleep to function optimally. Failing to get enough sleep night after night can compromise your health and may even shorten your life. From infancy to old age, the effects of inadequate sleep can profoundly affect memory, learning, creativity, productivity and emotional stability, as well as your physical health... Poor sleep is also a risk factor for depression and substance abuse, especially among people with post-traumatic stress disorder, according to Anne Germain, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh. People with PTSD tend to relive their trauma when they try to sleep, which keeps their brains in a heightened state of alertness. Dr. Germain is studying what happens in the brains of sleeping veterans with PTSD in hopes of developing more effective treatments for them and for people with lesser degrees of stress that interfere with a good night's sleep. [New York Times](#)

The 4-minute workout



19 June - ...[Researchers] gathered 26 overweight and sedentary but otherwise healthy middle-aged men, determined their baseline endurance and cardiovascular and metabolic health, and randomly assigned them to one of two groups. Half began a supervised exercise program that reiterated the Norwegian researchers' former routine. After briefly warming up, these volunteers ran on a treadmill at 90 percent of their maximal heart rate... for four four-minute intervals, with three minutes of slow walking between, followed by a brief cool-down. The entire session was repeated three times a week for 10 weeks. The second group, however, completed only one four-minute strenuous run. They, too, exercised three times a week for 10 weeks. At the end of the program, the men had increased their maximal oxygen uptake, or endurance capacity, by an average of 10 percent or more, with no significant differences in the gains between the two groups. [New York Times](#)

What to drink while expecting: Study says moderate booze OK

19 June - ...According to a British study, children born to mothers who drank moderately while pregnant did not show signs of balance problems when they were 10; trouble with balance is a good indicator of problems with brain development in utero, the authors say... [Ten-year-olds] whose mothers reported drinking three to seven alcoholic beverages a week during their 18th week of pregnancy were more likely to fall into the top 25% of performers on the balance exercises compared to those whose moms abstained... [T]he current results don't necessarily mean that it's time to rethink the advice that pregnant women shouldn't drink. Research [has shown](#) that drinking can cause physical deformities as well as behavioral and cognitive symptoms in babies, including fetal alcohol syndrome. [TIME](#)

Whooping cough can be deadly for infants, but 61 percent of adults don't know their vaccine status

17 June – Cases of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, are on the rise in the U.S., recently reaching their highest level in 50 years. The disease can be serious or even fatal to newborns who have not yet received vaccinations. Effective vaccines against pertussis have been available for many decades, but that vaccine protection can wear off over time. A new University of Michigan poll shows that 61 percent of adults say they don't know when they were last vaccinated against pertussis, which could mean they might be unwittingly exposing vulnerable babies to the disease. Only 20 percent of adults reported that they received the pertussis vaccine less than 10 years ago (the recommended time frame) and 19 percent said they were vaccinated more than 10 years ago. [EurekaAlert](#)

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Angola: Ongoing dengue epidemic

17 June - On April 1, 2013, the Public Health Directorate of Angola announced that six cases of dengue had been reported to the Ministry of Health of Angola (MHA). As of May 31, a total of 517 suspected dengue cases had been reported and tested for dengue with a rapid diagnostic test (RDT). A total of 313 (60.5%) specimens tested positive for dengue, including one from a patient who died. All suspected cases were reported from Luanda Province, except for two from Malanje Province. ...At least 91 laboratory-confirmed dengue cases have been reported recently in seven countries (Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Portugal, South Africa, and the United States) among persons who had recently traveled to Luanda.

[Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

Democratic Republic of Congo: Yellow fever

14 June - The Ministry of Health of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is launching an emergency mass vaccination campaign against yellow fever from 20 June 2013, following laboratory confirmation of six cases in the country on 6 June 2013. [WHO](#)

South Sudan: Lack of access, rains hinder aid to Jonglei IDPs

17 June - Tens of thousands of people have been cut off from water, food and medical care in South Sudan's Jonglei State, after fleeing violence between rebels and the government in Pibor County. They now face escalated risks as the rainy season starts, but aid agencies say the government has denied humanitarian access to these populations. According to the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), an estimated 120,000 people have fled Pibor to areas that "will shortly be under a meter or more of flood water". "The rainy season has already started, and we know from MSF's years of experience in Jonglei that without medical care, mortality rates will rise rapidly, with people dying of pneumonia and other respiratory diseases, malaria and diarrhoea," Bart Janssens, MSF director of operations, said in a statement on 14 June. "Furthermore, starting in June, the communities start to run out of food before the next harvest arrives. [IRIN](#)

Tanzania: Tanzanian high-risk groups denied HIV services

18 June - Sexual minorities, sex workers and people who use drugs who are at a higher risk of HIV than the general population, but in Tanzania, they face widespread police abuse and discrimination in health facilities, according to the new report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Wake Up and Step Forward Coalition (WASO), a local rights group. ...Abuses include denial of health services, violations of confidentiality and denial of freedom of association, as well as verbal harassment, arbitrary arrest, extortion, assault, torture, rape and murder. [IRIN](#)

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Jordan: CDC expert reports some anomalies in Jordan MERS cases

19 June – Eight Jordanians who had MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) infections in a hospital outbreak more than a year ago, as determined by recent blood tests, didn't quite match the profile of more recent cases, according to a CDC expert. Most of the eight people did not have preexisting diseases, and one of them had no symptoms, said Mark Pallansch, PhD, director of the CDC's Division of Viral Diseases. The majority of MERS-CoV cases reported in recent months involved patients who had preexisting health problems such as diabetes or heart disease. And the asymptomatic case appears to be the first one reported. The eight cases were associated with a hospital outbreak in Zarqa, Jordan, in April 2012. [CIDRAP](#)

Libya's "growing" drugs/HIV problem



17 June - Doctors in Libya say they are seeing a "growing" number of patients with drug problems and a corresponding risk of HIV infection, in a post-Gaddafi era marked by limited law enforcement and government capacity. "Every month more people come to us needing help," said Abdullah Fannir, deputy

director of Gargaresh psychiatric hospital in Tripoli. "It's part of the fallout from the revolution. Border control is weak, making it easy for drug-traffickers, and there's more demand as well. Hundreds of thousands of Libyans were displaced, wounded or bereaved during the uprising." [IRIN](#)

Pakistan: Mourning in Pakistan for murdered polio workers

17 June - Relatives are mourning two polio workers shot dead by suspected militants on Sunday in Pakistan's north-western Swabi district. Gunmen killed the two male health workers as they were providing vaccinations in Swabi's Kandari village. No group said it carried out the attack, but militants have accused polio workers of spying for the US. At least 17 polio workers and four security officials have died in attacks on polio health teams in recent months. [BBC News](#)

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

17 June 2013 - The Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia has announced an additional three laboratory-confirmed cases with Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV). The first patient is a 42-year-old man with an underlying medical condition from the Eastern region, the second patient is a 63-year-old woman with underlying medical conditions from

Riyadh region and the third patient is a two-year-old child with an underlying medical condition from Jeddah. Additionally, four previously laboratory-confirmed cases have died. Globally, from September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a total of 64 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including 38 deaths. [WHO](#)

Syria: Measles epidemic signals growing humanitarian needs

18 June - A measles epidemic is sweeping through districts of northern Syria, with up to 7,000 known cases, an indication that humanitarian needs are increasing and the country's healthcare system is in a state of collapse after more than two years of civil war. Teams from the international medical organisation Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) have vaccinated more than 75,000 children in the provinces of Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa and Idlib in an effort to stem the epidemic amongst a population previously unused to outbreaks of this kind. [ReliefWeb](#)

Syria's wounded generation

14 June - At an after-care center near Turkey's border with Syria, civilians and combatants recover from life-altering injuries. The Times's Mac William Bishop speaks to casualties of Syria's brutal civil war. [New York Times](#)

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USEUCOM

Israel: Health Ministry to combat spread of polio with vaccination campaign

18 June - The Health Ministry plans to launch a public awareness campaign focusing on the importance of hygiene after traces of the polio virus were detected in the sewage systems of a number of locations in southern Israel. The ministry has also decided to seek out all children who have not been vaccinated against polio, urging their parents to bring them to well-baby clinics across the country. [Haaretz](#)

Ukraine kids at risk from low vaccination rates

18 June - A combination of suspicion, funding problems, alleged corruption and inefficiency leave Ukraine with the lowest vaccination rate of the 15 former republics of the Soviet Union, even though it is one of the best developed — and the rate has fallen sharply in recent years. International health officials warn that the problems leave Ukraine vulnerable to an outbreak of polio, a disease that Europe has largely stamped out. Only about half of Ukraine's children are fully immunized against polio, measles, rubella and other diseases that vaccines can prevent, despite a government policy calling for free universal vaccination, according to UNICEF, the United Nations children's agency. That compares with a rate of some 90 percent or higher in most Western European countries. [Yahoo! News](#)

United Kingdom: Breast cancer risk has risen for South Asian women



13 June - The breast cancer risk for British Asian women has increased, a study carried out in Leicester suggests. Historically women from this ethnic group have had a lower risk of the disease than white British women, the University of Sheffield team said. But they found breast cancer incidence had risen in recent years for South Asian women. Experts said lifestyle factors such as obesity, or more coming forward for screening could explain the change.

[BBC](#)

United Kingdom: ‘Quiet epidemic’ of male cancer in UK

17 June - Action is needed to fight a "quiet epidemic" of oesophageal cancer, which is on the rise in the UK, particularly among men, cancer experts say. Men are almost three times more likely than women to get the cancer - one of the biggest gender divides in cancer rates, according to new figures. Early diagnosis is the key to saving lives, says a Cancer Research UK team. Scientists are working on ways to detect symptoms earlier and to decipher the genetic code of the cancer. Oesophageal cancer - cancer of the gullet or food pipe - is the ninth most common cancer in the UK. It is one of the most difficult cancers to detect and treat, with only about one in 10 patients surviving for 10 years or more. Latest figures show 5,600 UK men (almost 15 out of every 100,000) developed the disease in 2010, compared with 2,800 UK women (about five out of every 100,000). [BBC](#)

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USNORTHCOM

U.S.: Bioterror detection program comes under scrutiny

17 June - ...BioWatch, an alert system designed to be an early detection system for airborne threats such as anthrax and smallpox, was unveiled in 2003 by Pres. George W. Bush. In his State of the Union address, he talked about the system, saying he was, "deploying the nation's first early warning network of sensors to detect biological attack." Since then the system has cost \$1 billion and been met with mixed reviews. A committee convened by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Research Council (NRC) said in a 2011 report no expansion of the program should be made without better collaboration with the existing public health system. The panel also called for further analysis of the program and how it could be used to reduce mortality and morbidity. [Scientific American](#)

U.S., Colorado: Black Forest fire 65% contained but 483 homes destroyed

16 June - Firefighters in Colorado had the Black Forest fire 65 percent contained Sunday, and authorities said all residents of the area were accounted for. Authorities said the wildfire, which started Tuesday, had taken two lives while consuming 485 homes and blackening 14,198 acres, The Denver Post reported. About 1,175 personnel were working to control the blaze... The Post said investigators had yet to determine the cause of the fire, though the sheriff said it likely was human-caused... The Black Forest fire is the most destructive in Colorado history, surpassing 2012's Waldo Canyon fire that wiped out 346 homes, the Post said. [UPI](#)

U.S.: Homemade chemical bomb incidents — 15 states, 2003–2011

21 June - Homemade chemical bombs (HCBs) are made from commonly found chemicals. The volume of news reports of HCB explosions suggests they are not uncommon. To determine the number of events involving HCBs in the United States and describe the factors associated with them, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) analyzed data from its surveillance system that tracks spills and leaks of hazardous substances. This report describes the results of that analysis, which indicated that, during 2003–2011, a total of 134 events involving HCBs were reported from 15 states. Among those events, 21 (16%) resulted in adverse health effects (i.e., respiratory symptoms, burns, and skin irritation) for 53 persons. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S.: Kids born in polluted areas more likely to have autism



18 June - Babies born in areas with high airborne levels of mercury, diesel exhaust, lead, manganese, nickel and methylene chloride were more likely to have autism than those in areas with lower pollution. Women who live in areas with polluted air are up to twice as likely to have an autistic child than those living in communities with cleaner air, according to a new study published today. Building on two smaller, regional studies, the Harvard University research is the first to link air pollution nationwide with autism. It also is the first to suggest that baby boys may be more at risk for autism disorders when their mothers breathe polluted air during pregnancy. [Scientific American](#)

U.S.: National parks raise guard against virus

20 June - ...Near the peak of the summertime tourist season, Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks are fighting an outbreak of norovirus, the highly contagious gastrointestinal scourge of cruise ships. Park officials said that the virus had so far sickened 150 employees and 50 guests. Employees at the parks' lodges and restaurants have been scrubbing rooms

and sanitizing every surface to try to stop the spread of the virus. Sick employees, and some who might have been exposed, have been quarantined. On Wednesday, the National Park Service issued a statement warning visitors to the two parks to wash their hands to avoid the virus, which sickens about 21 million people every year in the United States. [New York Times](#)

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Bangladesh: Piped water for Dhaka slums

13 June - The Bangladesh government has started work on delivering piped water to more than three million Dhaka slum dwellers by the end of 2014, say officials. "By 2015, all slum dwellers will have access to piped water," Taqsem A Khan, the managing director of the Dhaka Water Supply & Sewerage Authority (WASA), told IRIN, citing the issue of water-borne diseases and their prevalence in slums. Under the current law, WASA is not allowed to provide water to homes without a holding number. However, that law will be amended making it no longer mandatory. The government has already started work in Korail, the country's biggest slum, home to 40,000 people. [IRIN](#)

Cambodia reports 13,700 malaria cases in 5 months, killing 4 people

17 June - Cambodia reported 13,700 malaria cases in the first five months of this year, down 60 percent from 31,100 cases in the same period last year, the National Center for Malaria reported Monday. From January to May this year, the disease killed 4 people, a sharp decrease compared with 27 deaths in the same period last year, the report said. Dr. Char Meng Chuor, head of the center, said the remarkable decline was thanks to mosquito net distribution and awareness campaign. Last year, more than a million of mosquito nets were given free-of-charge to the vulnerable groups of people throughout the country. He said the country is committed to eliminating the disease by 2025. [Xinhua](#)

India: H.I.V. tests urged for 800 million

17 June - Despite India's enormous population, it would be cost-effective to fight its growing [AIDS](#) epidemic by testing all 800 million sexually active adults in the country every five years and treating all those infected, [a new statistical study](#) has concluded. The study, published online in May by PLoS One, notes that testing there costs only \$3.33, and that first-line antiretroviral therapy is about \$100 a year. The World Health Organization measure for a medical intervention's cost-effectiveness is whether it saves one year of life for less than three times the per capita gross domestic product. In India's case, that is \$3,900 per year-of-life saved. [New York Times](#)

Japan: Rubella epidemic traced to past female-only vaccination efforts

14 June - Japan had 5,442 rubella cases in the first 4 months of this year, largely because past rubella vaccination programs did not target males, according to an article in today's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. The main aim of rubella vaccination is to prevent congenital rubella syndrome (CRS), which involves various birth defects in infants infected by their mothers, the article notes. Japan and several other countries that in the past targeted only girls and women for rubella vaccination have had large outbreaks among adolescent boys and young men. Rubella cases in Japan increased sharply in 2012, reaching 2,392. The increase has continued this year, with men between the ages of 20 and 39, who were not included in the initial rubella vaccination program, accounting for 68% of cases. Vaccination efforts targeting both boys and girls were strengthened starting in 2006, with the result that children under age 15 account for only 5.6% of the cases this year. [CIDRAP](#)

New Zealand: Law permits 'low risk' designer drugs

14 June - ...[New Zealand] looks set to adopt new laws permitting the limited sale of some designer drugs for recreational purposes. The legislation is the first in the world to regulate new recreational drugs based on scientific evidence of their risk of harm. Under the proposed laws, which were recommended to be passed with amendments by a parliamentary committee yesterday, manufacturers will be able to sell any currently unregulated psychoactive substance if they can demonstrate it has a "low risk of harm". But they also allow for any psychoactive substance not already regulated to be prohibited from sale until approved by a new regulator. [NewScientist](#)

Singapore fumes as air pollution hits 16-year high



18 June - Singaporeans rolled back military training, kept cough-stricken children indoors and considered wearing protective masks to work after a smoky haze triggered by forest fires in neighboring Indonesia caused air pollution to briefly hit its worst level in nearly 16 years... The readings on the Pollutant Standards Index were mostly between 104 and 123 on Tuesday, within the "unhealthy" range between 101 and 200. A peak reading of 155 on Monday night was the highest since late 1997, when officials reported a 226 reading. Smoke haze is a nearly annual problem for Singapore and its northern neighbor Malaysia, often beginning in midyear when farmers in Indonesia seek to clear land cheaply by starting fires. [Yahoo! News](#)

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Brazil: Q fever

17 June - An outbreak of Q fever, a rare illness in Brazil, is being investigated by the [Minas Gerais] State Secretariat of Health. Between June 2010 and February 2013, 81 suspected cases were notified in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte and in April 2013, 6 patients were seropositive for the illness. Q fever is a zoonosis that is more common in countries such as the USA, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands. The Netherlands, in recent years, had thousands of human cases confirmed. Human infection is caused by direct contact, inhalation of aerosolized secretions of the infected animal, or by the consumption of raw milk. Tania Martial, coordinator of the Minas Gerais Center for Strategic Information in Health Surveillance (CIEVS), however, affirms that the majority of patients with suspected [Q fever] did not have contact with the animal reservoirs of the illness. "As a precaution we are continuing with the inquiry", she said. [ProMED-mail](#)

Haiti moves a step closer toward eradicating elephantiasis



13 June - Haiti has finally carried out a nationwide campaign to get rid of the parasitic worms that cause elephantiasis. Haiti has waged other campaigns against the condition, characterized by severe disfiguration of the legs and arms. But until now, it has never managed to adequately reach residents of the chaotic capital Port-au-Prince. The latest effort by the Haitian Ministry of Health now puts the country on track to wipe out elephantiasis within the next four years, says a study published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

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