

24 April 2015

# Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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## Clinical Update Multidrug-Resistant Travelers' Diarrhea

Clinicians frequently prescribe antibiotics for travelers so that they can self-treat diarrhea if it develops.

Recent findings suggest that travelers who take antibiotics to treat diarrhea are at increased risk of becoming colonized with resistant bacteria, specifically with extended-spectrum  $\beta$ -lactamase-producing Enterobacteriaceae.

The risk is highest in South Asia, where 80% of travelers who had diarrhea and self-treated with antibiotics became colonized with these organisms. As shown in the current Shigella outbreak, travelers who are infected in other countries may continue to shed organisms after they return to the United States, producing local foci of infection.



## U.S. MILITARY

### Personal technology use by U.S. military service members and veterans: An update

1 April – [The] three broad military/veteran samples have personal technology habits that are similar to those of their civilian peers. Computers appear to be a valid target for health research and intervention with military consumers both at home and on deployment. Both desktop and laptop machines remain in high personal/non-work use by active duty SMs, Guard, Reserve, and veterans. Tablet devices also offer potential as mobile vehicles for mobile health education and care at home. Gaming devices are still popular both at home and on deployment and may offer some opportunities for healthcare, especially with the advent of gaming methodology for behavior change. ... The most vivid change in our data over the two surveys is the extreme increase of mobile phone use at home in recent years. PTEC2 data show mobile phone use in our samples of the military community at home to be as ubiquitous as it is in current civilian life. More than 9 out of 10 active duty SMs, Guard, Reserve, and veterans reported owning and using mobile phones for a wide variety of purposes. Clearly, for the moment at least, mobile personal devices may offer the ideal medium for accessible and portable health education and for intervention. [Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. publishers](#)

### Service members are left in dark on health errors



19 April - ... Only 18 months ago did the Pentagon explicitly allow [service members] to file complaints about their treatment, although some had done so earlier. But even then they are barred from learning the results of any inquiry. Under federal law, investigations at military hospitals and clinics are confidential ... In scores of interviews, active-duty

patients, relatives and military medical workers described how, in that information vacuum, attempts to ferret out the truth about suspected medical mistakes — through freedom-of-information requests, complaints, meetings with military medical officials — produced anodyne letters of condolence, blanket denials of poor care or simply nothing at all. "There is just no transparency. You can't sue. You have no insight into the process," said Cheryl Garner, a military intelligence officer who retired last year. "As active duty, we just don't have much recourse." [New York Times](#)

### Update: Exertional rhabdomyolysis, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2010–2014

March 2015 - Among active component U.S. service members in 2014, there were 403 incident episodes of rhabdomyolysis likely due to physical exertion or heat stress ("exertional rhabdomyolysis"). The annual incidence rates of exertional rhabdomyolysis

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increased nearly 50% during 2010–2014. In 2014, the highest incidence rates occurred in service members who were male; younger than 20 years of age; black, non-Hispanic; members of the Marine Corps and Army; recruit trainees; and in combat-specific occupations. Incidence rates were higher among service members with homes of record from the Northeast compared to other U.S. regions. Most cases of exertional rhabdomyolysis were diagnosed at installations that support basic combat/recruit training or major ground combat units of the Army or Marine Corps. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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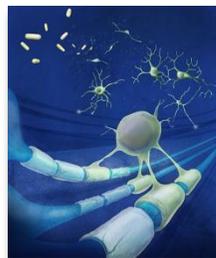
## GLOBAL

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### DNA blood test detects lung cancer mutations

17 April - Cancer DNA circulating in the bloodstream of lung cancer patients can provide doctors with vital mutation information that can help optimise treatment when tumour tissue is not available. ... The results have important implications for the use of cancer therapies that target specific cancer mutations. ... Testing for the presence of these mutations in the tumour itself is not always possible, however studies have suggested that DNA from the tumour that circulates in the bloodstream of patients may provide similar information. ... Comparison of the outcomes of EGFR testing in the two techniques showed an 89% rate of agreement between the blood test and tissue test. Plasma testing identified about half of the patients with EGFR mutations, compared to tissue testing (a sensitivity of 46%). [EurekAlert!](#)

### Drugs that activate brain stem cells may reverse multiple sclerosis



20 April - Two drugs already on the market -- an antifungal and a steroid -- may potentially take on new roles as treatments for multiple sclerosis. According to a study published in Nature today, researchers discovered that these drugs may activate stem cells in the brain to stimulate myelin producing cells and repair white matter, which is damaged in multiple sclerosis. ... [Both] drugs were effective in activating OPCs to enhance myelination and reverse paralysis. As a result, almost all of the animals regained the use of their hind limbs. They also found that the drugs acted through two very different molecular mechanisms. [NIH](#)

## Ex-Googlers' new breast cancer gene test cuts the cost to women



21 April - ... Tests for BRCA1 and BRCA2 typically cost up to \$4,000, and insurance companies have strict criteria when it comes to covering these tests, disqualifying many women who don't have a family history of cancer at a young age or don't meet other requirements. ... Color Genomics, a new company ...

hopes to make this type of genetic testing more affordable. Their company's Color Test, out today, is a mail-order, at-home saliva test that costs \$249 and tests 19 genes connected to breast and ovarian cancer, including BRCA1 and BRCA2. Mutations in those genes can indicate a risk for breast and ovarian cancer many times greater than the national average (in their lifetimes, 12% of American women will develop breast cancer and 1.3 % of American women will develop ovarian cancer). These kinds of mutations also put women at risk for cancer at a much younger age. Early detection greatly increases five-year survival rates, from 25% for late-stage breast cancer to 98% for early-stage breast cancer. If a woman knows her risk, she can pursue a range of options—including close monitoring or invasive prevention. [Fast Company](#)

## First infant MRI study finds babies feel pain 'like adults'

21 April - The brains of babies "light up" in a similar way to adults when exposed to the same painful stimulus, suggesting they feel pain much like adults do, researchers said on Tuesday. In the first of its kind study using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), scientists from Britain's Oxford University found that 18 of the 20 brain regions active in adults experiencing pain were also active in babies. Brain scans of the sleeping infants while they were subjected to mild pokes on the bottom of their feet with a special rod -- creating a sensation "like being poked with a pencil" -- also showed their brains had the same response to a slighter "poke" as adults did to a stimulus four times as strong, suggesting babies have a much lower pain threshold. [Reuters](#)

## Gene therapy: 'Tame HIV' used to cure disease

21 April - The lives of six boys with a deadly genetic disease have been transformed by a pioneering treatment to correct errors in their DNA, say doctors. A defective immune system in Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome leaves people vulnerable to infections and bleeding. ... It all stems from an error in the genetic code that contains the building instructions for a key element in the immune system - a protein called WAS. The main treatment is a bone marrow transplant - but that is an option only when the donor is a close tissue match, such as a sibling. The trial at Great Ormond Street Hospital, in London, and Necker Children's Hospital, in France, removed part of the children's bone marrow. It was purified in the laboratory to find the cells that regenerate the immune system and a tamed version of HIV was used to "infect" the cells with the correct DNA. The corrected bone marrow cells were

then put back into the children. In six out of seven boys, the therapy was a success. It reversed symptoms and massively cut the number of nights spent in hospital. [BBC News](#)

## Global pandemic of fake medicines poses urgent risk, scientists say

20 April - Poor quality medicines are a real and urgent threat that could undermine decades of successful efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, according to the editors of a collection of journal articles published today. Scientists report up to 41 percent of specimens failed to meet quality standards in global studies of about 17,000 drug samples. Among the collection is an article describing the discovery of falsified and substandard malaria drugs that caused an estimated 122,350 deaths in African children in 2013. Other studies identified poor quality antibiotics, which may harm health and increase antimicrobial resistance. However, new methodologies are being developed to detect problem drugs at the point of purchase and show some promise, scientists say. Scientists inspected the quality of about 16,800 samples of anti-malarials, anti-tuberculosis medicines, antibiotics and anti-leishmaniasis drugs and reported from 9 to 41 percent failed to meet the specifications. [NIH](#)

## Global vaccination targets ‘off-track’ warns WHO

22 April – Progress towards global vaccination targets for 2015 is far off-track with 1 in 5 children still missing out on routine life-saving immunizations that could avert 1.5 million deaths each year from preventable diseases. In the lead-up to World Immunization Week 2015 (24–30 April), WHO is calling for renewed efforts to get progress back on course. In 2013 nearly 22 million infants missed out on the required three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis-containing vaccines (DTP3), many of them living in the world’s poorest countries. WHO is calling for an end to the unnecessary disability and death caused by failure to vaccinate. [WHO](#)

## Rabies deaths higher than previously thought

20 April - Rabies kills 59,000 people a year, or about 160 a day — more than had previously been assumed — according to a study published last week. The report, based on mathematical modeling, is higher than previous estimates based on officially reported deaths, the authors said. It was produced by the Global Alliance for Rabies Control and published in PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases. Although India has the most rabies deaths — almost 21,000 a year — many African countries have higher per capita death rates. China also has a high death rate from rabies. [New York Times](#)

## Yet another study finds no link between MMR vaccine, autism

22 April - The alleged vaccine-autism connection has yet again been debunked. In a large retrospective cohort study of children with older siblings, the measles-mumps-rubella

(MMR) vaccine was shown to not be associated with autism, even in kids with an older sibling with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) yesterday, US researchers said they analyzed data from 95,727 children, 994 of whom (1%) were diagnosed as having ASD and 1,929 of whom (2%) had an older sibling with ASD. The investigators found that the receipt of MMR vaccine was not associated with an increased risk of ASD at any age and regardless of sibling ASD. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

## EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

### Ebola lying in wait

20 April - A growing body of scientific clues — some ambiguous, others substantive — suggests that the Ebola virus may have lurked in the West African rain forest for years, perhaps decades, before igniting the deadly epidemic that swept the region in the past year, taking more than 10,000 lives. Until recently, Ebola had been considered a threat mostly to Central African nations. Yet studies tell of possible Ebola antibodies in human blood samples drawn in West Africa long before the current outbreak. And genetic analysis suggests the West African virus broke off from a parent strain in Central Africa at least 10 years ago, possibly as long as 150 years ago. [New York Times](#)

### WHO leadership admits failings over Ebola, promises reform

19 April - The World Health Organization has admitted serious failings in its handling of the Ebola crisis and pledged reforms to enable it to do better next time, its leadership said in a statement seen by Reuters on Sunday. "We have learned lessons of humility. We have seen that old diseases in new contexts consistently spring new surprises," said the statement, attributed to the WHO Director-General Margaret Chan and the deputy director-general and regional directors. ... The statement also spelled out the WHO's plans to reform so that it would be prepared for similar emergencies in future. "We can mount a highly effective response to small and medium-sized outbreaks, but when faced with an emergency of this scale, our current systems – national and international - simply have not coped." ... The planned reforms include the establishment of a 1,000- strong emergency reserve force, a contingency fund and a rapid-response force, as well as a stronger command structure at the WHO and stronger international health rules to make sure every country is up to standard for disease preparedness. [Reuters](#)

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## INFLUENZA

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

For Week 14

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity continues to decrease to baseline levels in most areas. However, Indiana is still experiencing high activity levels.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity continued to decrease as was at minimal to low levels.
- PACOM: Moderate influenza activity was seen in Hawaii and there was minimal activity throughout the rest of PACOM.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity was minimal.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity remains low. [AFHSC DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

### CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 14 (April 5-11, 2015), influenza activity continued to decrease in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 11,189 specimens tested and reported by U.S. World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories during week 14, 1,076 (9.6%) were positive for influenza.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the epidemic threshold.
- Outpatient Illness Surveillance: The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 1.8%, which is below the national baseline of 2.0%. Three regions reported ILI at or above region-specific baseline levels. [FluView](#)

### DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During 29 March - 11 April 2015, (Surveillance Weeks 13 & 14) a total of 105 specimens were collected and received from 34 locations. Results were finalized for 49 specimens from 27 locations. During Week 13, the laboratory identified three influenza A(H3N2) and seven influenza B. During Week 14, five influenza B were identified. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

### Flu News Europe

Week 15/2015 (6-12 April 2015)

- Influenza activity continued to decrease in most reporting countries: the proportion of influenza-virus-positive specimens from sentinel sources decreased from 36% for week 14 to 28% for week 15. Since week 51/2014 the positivity rate has been over the

threshold of 10%, indicating seasonal influenza activity.

- Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2) and type B viruses continued to circulate in the WHO European Region, but type B viruses accounted for 69% of sentinel detections for week 15/2015.
- The number of hospitalised influenza cases is returning to low levels.
- Excess all-cause mortality among people aged 65 years and above, concomitant with increased influenza activity and the predominance of A(H3N2) viruses, had been observed in most countries participating in the European project for monitoring excess mortality for public health action (EuroMOMO), but has now abated (see the EuroMOMO website).
- Antigenic drift in the A(H3N2) and B/Yamagata viruses was observed in the 2014–2015 influenza season, so the northern hemisphere vaccine did not provide optimal protection against the A(H3N2) viruses. The B/Yamagata component in the vaccine is likely to protect against the circulating viruses.
- Of all the influenza viruses screened for reduced susceptibility to neuraminidase inhibitors, only four A(H3N2) viruses have shown this phenotype: three to oseltamivir only and one to oseltamivir and zanamivir. [Flu News Europe](#)

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

For Week 15 (through 18 April 2015):

- Influenza: Two cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza one (A/H3) and one type B among US military basic trainees. Decreasing influenza activity at US military recruit sites
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were at or below expected values. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

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

For the Week Ending 11 April 2015 (Week 14):

Influenza activity in Army and civilian populations as well as the number of respiratory specimens tested continue decreasing.

- ILI activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week fourteen were 8% lower than in week thirteen.
- Influenza cases: 4 hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in weeks thirteen and fourteen: 2 active duty (AD) Service members (SMs) who were vaccinated and 2 non-AD beneficiaries who were not vaccinated. To date, 95 cases have been reported during this influenza season: 25 AD SM and 70 non-AD beneficiaries.
- Viral specimens: During week fourteen, 98 of 518 (19%) laboratory specimens tested

positive for respiratory pathogens; 15 of 395 (3.8%) specimens tested for influenza A were positive. SRMC reported the most influenza A-positive specimens (40%), followed by ERMC (33%), NRMCM and PRMC (both 13%), and WRMC and CENTCOM (both 0%).  
[USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

## WHO Influenza Update

20 April - Influenza activity declined further in the northern hemisphere and was low in most regions globally. While influenza A(H3N2) viruses predominated this season in the northern hemisphere, the proportions of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and B viruses increased during the past few weeks.

- In North America, influenza activity continued to decrease. While influenza A(H3N2) had predominated this season, influenza B was the dominant virus during the recent weeks.
- In Europe, influenza activity continued to decrease in most countries. Influenza A(H3N2) predominated this season, but the proportion of influenza B detections was predominant in the last weeks.
- In northern Africa and the Middle East, influenza activity continued to decrease in most of the region. Influenza A viruses remained predominant in the region.
- In western Asia, influenza activity continued to decrease or remained low in most countries in the region, with a predominance of influenza A viruses. Influenza detections however remained high or possibly increased in Jordan and Turkey.
- In the temperate countries of Asia, influenza activity continued to decrease except in the Republic of Korea where activity remained high. Influenza A(H3N2) virus was predominant with an increase of influenza B virus detections in the Republic of Korea. In northern China influenza B virus remained predominant but detections decreased.
- In tropical countries of the Americas, influenza activity was low in most countries.
- In tropical Asia, influenza activity mainly due to influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses seemed to be declining in India. Influenza activity continued to decrease from its peak in southern China where influenza B virus was predominant, and in China Hong Kong Special Administrative Region where influenza A(H3N2) virus was the most frequently detected virus subtype.
- In tropical Africa, increased influenza activity was reported from western Africa with a mixture of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2) and B viruses circulating. Madagascar reported decreasing influenza activity after experiencing increased influenza activity from February, with a peak at the beginning of March, due to influenza A(H3N2) and B.
- In the southern hemisphere, influenza activity remained at inter-seasonal levels. [WHO](#)

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## Doctors don't always ask about pet-related health risks



20 April - ... Pets can transmit dozens of diseases to humans, but doctors aren't always as good as they should be in asking about pets in the home and humans' health issues, a study finds. And that goes for people doctors and animal doctors. "The fact that they're equally uneducated is concerning," says Jason Stull, an assistant professor of veterinary preventive medicine at Ohio State University and lead author of the review. ... "There hasn't been a great dialogue between the veterinary community, the human health community and the public." ... People should be sure to let their human health-care providers know that they have pets, Stull says, and let the vet know if there are family members who are at greater risk of animal-borne infections. That includes children under age 5, pregnant women, older people, and anyone with a weakened immune system due to things like chemotherapy, HIV/AIDS or organ transplants. [NPR](#)

## Goat plague hits poor farmers in Africa, Asia, wider vaccination needed: FAO

22 April - Goat plague, a fast spreading virus, impoverishes millions of small farmers across Africa and Asia, but a campaign to eradicate it has drawn far less support than halting mad cow disease or Ebola, a U.N. veterinary official said on Wednesday. 'Peste des petits ruminants' (PPR) or goat plague, attacks sheep and goats - crucial to the livelihood of more than 300 million herders in the developing world - and costs those who can least afford it some \$2 billion a year, the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reported. Despite an effective vaccine which can protect animals, PPR has spread rapidly in the past 15 years into more than 60 countries, it said. [Reuters](#)

## Humans' use of pain-relief creams proves fatal to felines

20 April - Veterinarians have long warned that pain medications like ibuprofen are toxic to pets. And it now looks like merely using a pain relief cream can put cats at risk. That's what happened in two households, according to a report issued Friday by the Food and Drug Administration. Two cats in one household developed kidney failure and recovered with attention from a veterinarian. But in a second household, three cats died. When the veterinarians performed necropsies on the three dead cats, they found toxic levels of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs. NSAIDs include ibuprofen, like Advil and Motrin, and naproxen, which is in Aleve. Ibuprofen is the most common drug that pets eat, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association, perhaps since many of the pills are candy-coated. In pets, the drugs can cause stomach or intestinal ulcers and kidney failure. But these cats died by flurbiprofen, another NSAID. In the case of its most recent

victims, the cat owner applied a lotion or cream containing flurbiprofen to treat muscle or arthritis pain. [NPR](#)

## Texas ice cream maker recalls all products over Listeria

21 April - Texas-based Blue Bell Creameries announced on Monday a voluntary recall of all its ice cream and frozen treat products from store shelves due to continuing problems with the Listeria bacteria. The move is the most recent in a string of recall announcements by the 108-year-old company, based in Brenham, after health officials said last month three people made ill by Listeria between January 2014 and January 2015 had died in a Kansas hospital where Blue Bell frozen treats were served. Monday's decision came after the bacteria was detected in Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough ice cream samples that were tested last month.

[Reuters](#)

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### WELLNESS

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## Abuse-deterrent formulations put dent in opioid ODs

20 April - Two changes to the pain medication market, the introduction of tamper-resistant OxyContin and the removal of propoxyphene, were followed by decreases in opioid prescription-related overdoses and dispensation of these medications, researchers reported. Two years after these two market interventions, opioid-related overdoses dropped by 20%, and opioid dispensation rates dropped by 19%, from the expected rate of increase over a decade. ... Abuse-deterrent mechanisms can only act as a component of a larger public health strategy, [Hillary] Kunins asserts. "These formulations will not prevent people receiving high doses of opioids from overdosing ... [and] do not prevent the initial exposure to opioids," he added. [MedPage Today](#)

## A surge in federal funding for Mental Health First Aid could make it as popular as CPR

19 April - ... The Mental Health First Aid course, advocates say, could grow to be what CPR is to heart attack victims. The federal government has spent more than \$20 million since 2013 to make the course available in local communities. ... "You are far more likely to come across someone having a mental health crisis or substance abuse disorder than a heart attack or choking on the piece of food at a restaurant," said Bryan Gibb, director of public education for the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, which manages the course nationwide. About 20 percent of people have a mental health issue. Less than 1 percent have a heart attack each year. ... The eight-hour course teaches how to identify symptoms such as depression and how and when to intervene. It is typically offered through county behavioral health departments to a variety of public service, educational and

nonprofit workers, and in some cases to the general public. [Mercury News](#)

## Depression: 'Mindfulness-based therapy shows promise'



21 April – A mindfulness-based therapy could offer a "new choice for millions of people" with recurrent depression, a Lancet report suggests. Scientists tested it against anti-depressant pills for people at risk of relapse and found it worked just as well. The therapy trains people to focus their minds and understand that

negative thoughts may come and go. ... Patients who have had recurrent clinical depression are often prescribed long-term anti-depressant drugs to help prevent further episodes. And experts stress that drug therapy is still essential for many. In this study, UK scientists enrolled 212 people who were at risk of further depression on a course of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) while carefully reducing their medication. ... Researchers compared these results to 212 people who continued to take a full course of medication over two years. By the end of the study, a similar proportion of people had relapsed in both groups. And many in the MBCT group had been tapered off their medication. [BBC News](#)

## H.I.V. cases lead Indiana to extend needle exchanges

20 April - Gov. Mike Pence of Indiana extended a needle exchange program for another 30 days on Monday as the number of H.I.V. cases linked to intravenous drug use in a rural county continued to grow, with new cases being reported almost daily. Mr. Pence, a Republican who has long opposed needle exchanges, first authorized the program last month when he declared a 30-day public health emergency in Scott County, which has about 24,000 residents and is near the Kentucky border. At the time, about 80 people there had tested positive for H.I.V. since December. But the number of cases has grown since then to 128, and state health officials say they are still trying to find and test everyone who could have been exposed to the virus. [New York Times](#)

## HPV vaccine effective at multiple sites

21 April - Women ages 18 to 25 who received the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine before exposure to the virus are strongly protected against future infection at three risk-prone anatomic sites. And the vaccine appears to provide some protection even in those previously exposed. ... "Earlier studies have reported just on whether the vaccine is protective against cervical HPV alone, but we treated it as, 'Does the vaccine protect an individual woman against HPV at all three of her at-risk sites -- cervical, anal, and oral?'" Beachler told *MedPage Today*. ... "We see a strong multi-site vaccine efficacy for those unexposed to HPV prior to vaccination, as we would expect -- but we also see that the vaccine may provide some protection at one or more sites in women who were exposed to HPV prior to vaccination," said Beachler in a press conference. [MedPage Today](#)

## Slippery slope: Diet drugs no help for heart

19 April - After 13 years of rejecting applications for new diet drugs, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in the last 3 years has allowed five potentially harmful products on the market -- including two in the last 4 months. The agency approved the drugs despite the potential for serious side effects, including suicidal thinking, increased heart rate, and cancer risk, and no proof the drugs improve the main health concern posed by obesity -- cardiovascular harms such as heart attacks. Critics worry the new products will repeat the diet-drug mistakes of the past, which have led to decades of injuries, deaths, and, in the end, products forced off the market. The FDA's about-face comes after pressure from the companies that manufacture the drugs, medical societies that get funding from those drug makers, and even the U.S. Senate -- where pharmaceutical money also finds takers -- which in 2011 called on the FDA to approve new obesity treatments. [MedPage Today](#)

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### USAFRICOM

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## Democratic Republic of the Congo: Malaria outbreak in South Kivu



20 April - A little reported malaria epidemic has been quietly claiming children's lives in the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although the disease is endemic to the country, this most recent outbreak has been particularly severe in both scale and severity. The MSF supported hospital in Baraka has struggled to cope with the endless stream of patients, often children under five years old who are referred in need of urgent intensive care. Throughout 2014, MSF team in Baraka treated a record 89,776 patients for malaria, more than double the number of people treated the previous year (42,390) or the year previously (42,305). [Medecins Sans Frontieres](#)

## Libya: Hundreds feared dead as boat capsizes off Libya coast

20 April - As many as 700 people were feared dead after a fishing boat packed with migrants capsized off the Libyan coast overnight in what officials said may be the Mediterranean's worst disaster as thousands flee poverty and war to Europe. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) said that around 50 people had been rescued of the 700 reported to be aboard. Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said the rescue operation was continuing. ... Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi called for an

emergency meeting of European Union leaders this week, saying "We cannot remain insensitive when every day there is a massacre in the Mediterranean." The incident happened in an area just off Libyan waters, 193km south of Lampedusa island, according to a report in the Times of Malta's website. This comes amid a wave of migrants trying to leave Libya for Italian shores. [Al Jazeera](#)

## Niger shuts schools and vaccinates children to fight meningitis outbreak

21 April - Niger has shut all schools in the region around the capital Niamey and launched a campaign to vaccinate children aged two to 15 in an effort to halt a meningitis outbreak that has killed at least 85 since January. Schools will be closed from Wednesday until Monday next week, the government said, adding that 905 cases of the disease had been recorded, most of them in Niamey and the west of the country. "A vaccination campaign targeting children will start on Friday April 24," the statement said. ... Authorities said the current outbreak included the W135, "C" strain and pneumococcal kinds of meningitis.

[Reuters](#)

## Nigeria: Pesticide the likely cause of Nigeria 'mystery disease'

19 April - Pesticide poisoning was the likely cause of the mysterious deaths of at least 18 people in a southwestern Nigerian town earlier this week, the World Health Organisation said Sunday. The "current hypothesis is cause of the event is herbicides", WHO spokesman Gregory Hartl said in a Tweet. "Tests done so far are negative for viral and bacterial infection," he added. The victims began showing symptoms early last week. ... The victims, whose symptoms included headache, weight loss, blurred vision and loss of consciousness, died within a day of falling ill in the town of Ode-Irele, in southwestern Ondo state. The Ondo state health commissioner, Dayo Adeyanju, told AFP news agency on Saturday that 23 people had been affected. Akinmade said health officials and experts from the government and aid agencies, as well as WHO epidemiologists, had arrived in Ode-Irele to investigate the deaths. [Al Jazeera](#)

## Somalia: Somaliland abuzz from Ethiopia's khat convoys

21 April - Every day trucks loaded with the narcotic plant khat, grown in northeastern Ethiopia, hurtle along rough roads through the desert to make fresh deliveries to eager customers across Somaliland. It's estimated that 90 percent of adult males in the autonomous region of Somaliland chew khat for mirqaan, the Somali word for its euphoric effect. Khat has become so enmeshed with Somaliland's culture and daily life it has become an important tax earner for the government. In 2014, khat sales generated 20 percent of the \$152m budget. But despite this windfall, plenty of critics highlight the disrupting influence khat has on family life - from financial waste to domestic violence - and on the society at large. "The problem comes down to the man not being part of the family and the woman being left to do everything," said Fatima Saeed, a political adviser to the opposition Wadani

Party, who previously worked for 15 years with the United Nations. [Al Jazeera](#)

## Tanzania: Typhoid outbreak hits Zanzibar

22 April – Local health officials have declared typhoid fever outbreak in Zanzibar municipality, after at least 22 residents were afflicted with the disease. The number of patients was recorded at Mnazi Mmoja hospital alone. According to the head of the diseases surveillance unit, Dr Salma Masauni Yussuf, patients suffered from headaches, recurring fever, stomach pains and either constipation or diarrhoea that lasted for several days. [AllAfrica](#)

## Uganda: Typhoid outbreak nears 2000

18 March - In a follow-up to earlier reports on the Uganda typhoid outbreak, the World Health Organization (WHO) via the Uganda Ministry of Health put the outbreak near 2,000 cases since its genesis in Kampala at the beginning of the year. As of 5 March 2015, a total of 1940 suspected cases have been reported. From the first epicentre in downtown Kampala, the outbreak has now spread to all divisions in the capital city and to neighboring districts, WHO reports. The most affected groups are young males aged between 20 and 39 years. The majority of cases work in the business sector or as casual labourers. Food and juice vendors and cooks are also affected, hence the potential for wide spread of the disease. [Outbreak News Today](#)

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### USCENTCOM

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## Syria: Doctors testify at UN over Syria chemical attacks

17 April – The U.N. Security Council listened Thursday to Syrian doctors who attempted to rescue children affected by alleged chlorine attacks in Idlib province of Syria. Behind closed doors, Council members were shown footage of children dying following an alleged chemical weapon attack in Sarmin, near Idlib in northern Syria in March. According to international watchdog Human Rights Watch, more than 200 civilians including 20 civil defense workers were exposed to toxic chemicals in several barrel bomb attacks between March 16 and 31. In a press conference following the meeting with the doctors, U.S. representative to the U.N. Samantha Power said all members of the Security Council were moved by the footage. Power called for action against the Syrian regime's chemical attacks by overcoming division at the fifteen-member council. [Al Bawaba](#)

## Syria: ‘They were just struggling to breathe’



17 April - Dr. Mohammed Tennari first saw the six members of the Talib family when they were carried into his cramped field hospital in northern Syria on the night of March 16. They had been taking refuge in the basement of their home in the town of Sarmin when a barrel bomb filled with

chemical gases struck their house. The gas, being heavier than air, quickly filtered down into the basement, poisoning the family. Tennari and his team struggled to revive the three small children, their mother, father, and grandmother, as life slipped away from them, he explained to me in a Skype call earlier this month from his field hospital in Sarmin.

Everything smelled of bleach; the doctor himself felt nauseous from the fumes, and one of the nurses fainted. All six family members would die. "There were no wounds, no bleeding, they were just struggling to breathe," he said of the attack. "Their lungs were filled with liquid as well — it was suffocation, to the point where the heart stopped beating." [Foreign Policy](#)

## Yemen: WHO says warfare has left Yemen's health system near collapse

21 April - The World Health Organization (WHO) warned today that warfare in Yemen has pushed the country's health system to the brink of collapse as facilities struggle with shortages of medicines and supplies along with power supply interruptions. The agency said lack of fuel has hindered the use of back-up power generators and has also disrupted ambulance services and the delivery of supplies. "Power cuts and fuel shortages also threaten to disrupt the vaccine cold chain, leaving millions of children below the age of five unvaccinated," the WHO said in a statement. ... In addition, shortages of clean water have increased the risk of diarrheal and other diseases, the agency said. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

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**USEUCOM**

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## Ukraine: In rebel territory of Ukraine, older residents fight to live

15 April - ... In November, President Petro O. Poroshenko signed an order that closed all government institutions in areas of southeastern Ukraine under rebel control: police stations, courthouses, universities and hospitals. As a result, deliveries of drugs to regional

hospitals were also halted. People with health problems could receive pensions and medical treatment if they traveled across the front lines into government-held territory. Russia has demanded that Ukraine resume paying social benefits and health care costs in the southeast, but still recognize the autonomy of the separatist governments. ... Meanwhile, hospitals delay planned surgery because there are no anesthetics. Diabetics are told to travel across the front lines for treatment. "Just imagine a health care system without drugs," said Loic Jaeger, the deputy director of the Ukraine mission for Doctors Without Borders. "With diabetes or heart problems, it is easy to say someone will die if they don't get their medicine." [New York Times](#)

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## USNORTHCOM

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### U.S., Alabama: Montgomery spice victim number climbs to near 80

20 April - The weekend saw more spice cases under investigation by the Montgomery Police Department. Ten new cases were added to the growing list which now includes 79 patients affected by the dangerous drug. On Friday Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange confirmed during a joint city-county-state news conference that the city's police department has opened a death investigation that is possibly related to the latest batch of extremely dangerous spice. Mayor Strange did not provide specific details about the case but could say the body was surrounded by "spice materials". An autopsy is being performed, the mayor confirmed. Friday, the city confirmed 72 victims who are suffering life-threatening injuries from what is believed to be a particularly dangerous form of the drug. That was up more than a dozen cases in a single day. Victims range in age from 14 to 50 years in age and are mostly male. [WSFA](#)

### U.S.: Californians can now pay cash for health insurance at 7-Eleven



21 April - The largest publicly run health plan in the nation, L.A. Care, will allow customers who do not have traditional bank accounts to pay their health insurance premiums with cash. One in four Americans who were previously uninsured and eligible for federal insurance subsidies don't have a bank account, relying instead on prepaid debit cards, money orders and cash to pay bills, according to a study by Jackson Hewitt Tax Service. After advocates for low-income consumers raised concerns to the Department of Health and Human Services over how so-called unbanked households would pay their monthly insurance premiums, the

Obama administration ordered health plans to accept payment methods that didn't require a credit card or checking account. [NPR](#)

## **U.S.: Occupational traumatic injuries among workers in health care facilities — United States, 2012–2014**

24 April - In 2013, one in five reported nonfatal occupational injuries occurred among workers in the health care and social assistance industry, the highest number of such injuries reported for all private industries. In 2011, U.S. health care personnel experienced seven times the national rate of musculoskeletal disorders compared with all other private sector workers. ... A total of 112 U.S. facilities reported 10,680 OSHA-recordable patient handling and movement (4,674 injuries); slips, trips, and falls (3,972 injuries); and workplace violence (2,034 injuries) injuries occurring from January 1, 2012–September 30, 2014. Incidence rates for patient handling; slips, trips, and falls; and workplace violence were 11.3, 9.6, and 4.9 incidents per 10,000 worker-months, respectively. Nurse assistants and nurses had the highest injury rates of all occupations examined. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

## **U.S.: The FDA might finally crack down on homeopathy**

20 April - ... About 3.3 million Americans spent \$2.9 billion on homeopathic treatments in 2007, according to the latest estimates from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), though private industry research suggests a smaller market. The industry has "mushroomed" since the early 1980s. ... The FDA had the authority to regulate homeopathic remedies, but because sales were so small, the agency opted to outsource much of that job to the industry itself. ... [Cynthia] Schnedar acknowledges it's time for the FDA to reevaluate that policy. "We've seen a huge expansion of the market and we've also seen some emerging safety and quality issues," she says. ... She wouldn't elaborate on changes the FDA is considering, but in its notice about the sessions, the agency said it would seek data about the risks and benefits of homeopathic products, recommendations on regulatory processes, and would look into whether consumers "have adequate information to make informed decisions" about such remedies. [BloombergBusiness](#)

## **U.S.: The rise of Powassan virus**

20 April - ... What is Powassan virus? DF: It is a virus transmitted by tick-bite and was first discovered in Powassan, Ontario, in 1958. The virus is normally transmitted among wildlife (mammals) and humans get it when certain kinds of ticks become infected and later bite humans. It cannot be transmitted directly between humans as are many other diseases caused by viruses. What kind of disease does it cause? DF: Powassan virus attacks the nervous system and can infect the brain causing inflammation, a condition known as encephalitis. It can also infect the lining of the brain, causing meningitis. Symptoms of infection range widely from none to death. Serious infections can cause severe headache, muscle weakness, confusion and seizures within a week or more after infection. Long-term neurological effects may also result. Fatalities have been reported in 10 percent of cases with serious neurological disease. Fortunately, most infections appear not to cause serious

illness. [Yale School of Public Health](#)

## U.S.: Top hospital ratings prove scarce in Medicare's latest tally

17 April - On Thursday the federal government awarded its first star ratings to hospitals based on the opinions of patients. Some of the nation's most lofty hospitals—the ones featured in best hospital lists—received mediocre ratings, while the maximum number of stars often went to small, regional hospitals and others that specialize in lucrative surgeries. Evaluating hospitals is becoming increasingly important as more insurance plans offer patients limited choices. ... Medicare publishes dozens of quality measures on its Hospital Compare website, but many are tough to decrypt. ... (You can see all hospital ratings [here](#).)  
NPR

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### USPACOM

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## China: Hundreds of Chinese cities don't meet air standards, report finds



21 April - Air pollution data from the Chinese government shows that more than 90 percent of 360 Chinese cities failed to meet national air quality standards in the first three months of this year, according to a report released on Tuesday by Greenpeace East Asia. Interior provinces were found to have the most polluted cities during those months.

Cities near the eastern and southern coasts also had dire levels of fine pollutants, but the levels were lower than in the same period one year ago, the report said. The drop could be because of central government policies announced in late 2013 aimed at limiting coal use in China's most densely populated regions. [New York Times](#)

## India: Indian minister says 2,000 girls killed every day

21 April - Two thousand girls are killed every day due to a preference for sons in India, with most aborted or murdered just after birth, the country's minister for women and child development said. Despite laws that ban parents from having tests to determine the gender of unborn children, sex-selective abortions remain a common practice in parts of India. ... A May 2011 study in British medical journal *The Lancet* found that up to 12 million Indian girls were aborted over the last three decades, resulting in a skewed child sex ratio of 918 girls to every 1,000 boys in 2011, versus 962 in 1981. ... [The] government's "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign, which aims to reverse the

declining number of girls, had already shown results since its launch in January. ... [The] campaign had led to an increase in unwanted girl infants ending up in orphanages but said this was a positive response as it meant they had moved "from being killed to being thrown out." [VOA](#)

## Myanmar: Dengue on the rise in Mon State

22 April - A dramatic increase in deadly dengue fever has put nearly 150 people in hospital in the past four months, including one patient who died, health officials in Mon State say. Dr Nyan Sint, head of the state dengue haemorrhagic fever department, said there were now 148 people in Mawlamyine hospital suffering from the fever. Normally there are just a handful of patients at any one time, he said. "The reasons for the increase are the rise in population in urban areas," he said, also citing unplanned village development and climate change. [Myanmar Times](#)

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### USSOUTHCOM

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## Brazil seeing nearly half a million dengue cases in 1st three months of 2015, enlists Army's support

18 April - Brazil has called up the Army, but not for your typical war, it's a war on the mosquito borne virus, dengue fever, which has seen a 240 percent increase compared to the same period last year. Officials in the country's largest city of Sao Paulo requested that the army help in the battle against dengue where a surge of cases has brought the city tally at 32,000 and the state total is about half the country's total. In addition, 132 dengue related fatalities have been reported in the first quarter. [Soldiers will] accompany municipal health officials in house-to-house inspections aimed at eradicating breeding areas for the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that transmits the disease. [Outbreak News Today](#)

## PAHO reports small increase in chikungunya cases

20 April - The number of chikungunya cases reported in the Americas grew by just 722 cases last week, putting the total at 1,372,126 cases, according to an Apr 17 update from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The increase is dramatically lower than increases that have ranged from 13,000 to 30,000 in recent weeks. Many countries, though, have not reported to PAHO on their chikungunya situation in several weeks. The total reported last week reflects 1,338,240 suspected, 30,266 confirmed and 3,620 imported cases. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

## Peru: Dengue epidemic expands to 16 regions

21 April - The Department of Epidemiology of the Ministry of Health reported that Peru is currently enduring an epidemic of dengue, according to El Comercio. Of the most affected regions, Piura, Tumbes, and Loreto have the highest rates of infection of the mosquito-transmitted disease. So far these regions have recorded 2,603; 2,211; and 1,362 cases of dengue respectively. These three regions alone represent 70% of all of Peru's 8,505 cases reported so far. The illness has taken the lives of four so far this year, including two in Piura and two in Tumbes. While in 2014, 31 people died and 19,000 cases were reported in Peru.

[Peru this Week](#)

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