

25 October 2013

Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database

The Department of Defense is providing all of its healthcare practitioners with online access to *Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database*®.

The *Database* provides you with evidence-based answers on thousands of natural medicines and alternative therapies. The *Database* is updated daily and gives you answers on safety, effectiveness, adverse reactions, drug



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U.S. MILITARY

Pelvic inflammatory disease among female recruit trainees, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2002-2012

September 2013 - ...Between January 2002 and December 2011, 223,642 females entered basic training on active duty, all services. Of the recruit population, 200,508 (89.7%) completed their training... The surveillance population consisted of 161,501 female service members, and 1,750 (1.1%) met the surveillance case definition for [pelvic inflammatory disease] PID; of the total number of cases, 1,719 (98.2%) were classified as acute PID and 31 (1.8%) were classified as chronic PID... Overall incidence rates remained stable with slight fluctuations over the surveillance period (range: 10.2 per 1,000 person-years [p-yrs] to 14.9 per 1,000 p-yrs), with the exception of a decline for females accessed in 2011 (5.1 per 1,000 p-yrs)... Of the 1,750 cases, 50.2 percent were in the Army; 44.9 percent were white, non-Hispanic; and 70.5 percent were aged 17-20. For 93.9 percent, the highest level of educational achievement was less than a college degree, and 82.8 percent were single.

[Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Study: Lack of financial literacy may trigger vets' homelessness

22 October - Veterans are more likely to end up homeless not just because of military stressors but also because of poor financial skills, according to new research. A new report in the American Journal of Public Health found that military members in general are less familiar with household budgets, more likely to be targets for predatory lenders and "may not have the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for being financially independent and managing money." The study — part of a host of new research released by the journal Tuesday on veterans housing and health issues — might help explain why veterans are overrepresented in the homeless population. Past studies have found that veterans make up about 20 percent of Americans without stable housing, even though veterans are less than 8 percent of the population. [Stars and Stripes](#)

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GLOBAL

Cholera vaccine yields 5-year protection, finds acceptance

18 October - A study released today shows that an oral cholera vaccine made in India is the first such vaccine to offer significant protection for 5 years, while another new report says

National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day October 26, 2013 – 10am to 2pm

The National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day aims to provide a safe, convenient, and responsible means of disposing of prescription drugs, while also educating the general public about the potential for abuse of medications.

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CDC: "The Truth about Tanning" Infographic

Your natural skin color is great the way it is!



Classified Version of the Weekly Update

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

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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

the vaccine was well-accepted in an immunization campaign last year in the African country of Guinea. The vaccine, Shanchol, is made by Shantha Biotechnics and was endorsed by the World Health Organization in 2011. It is a modified version of an earlier vaccine, Dukoral, made by the Swedish company SBL Vaccin AB. Control of cholera has relied mainly on sanitation and safe drinking water. Despite the availability of cholera vaccines in recent years, concerns about cost, acceptability, and implementation have discouraged their use, as noted in the new reports. [CIDRAP](#)

Fake Xanax anxiety pills from China seized in Zurich

18 October - Customs agents have seized one million fake anti-anxiety pills in transit at Zurich airport, Swiss officials say. The four-crate shipment was on its way from China to Egypt, the Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products said. The tablets are counterfeit versions of Xanax - a drug manufactured by Pfizer to treat severe anxiety or panic disorder. Tests showed the drugs contained no active ingredients, but would be very difficult to recognise as fakes... Developing countries such as Egypt are considered a major market for the multi-billion dollar trade in fake drugs. [BBC News](#)

Progress toward global eradication of dracunculiasis — January 2012–June 2013

25 October - ... Substantial progress has been made since 1986 in reducing the annual number of reported dracunculiasis cases. The 1991 and 2004 World Health Assembly (WHA) goals to eradicate dracunculiasis globally by 1995 and 2009, respectively, were not achieved. Nevertheless, considerable progress toward eradication continues to be made. The number of cases of dracunculiasis worldwide reported by countries in which the disease is endemic decreased 49%, from 1,058 cases in 2011 to 542 cases in 2012. In January–June 2013, the 89 cases reported from 28 villages in the four remaining dracunculiasis-endemic countries (Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, and South Sudan) represent reductions of 77% and 45%, respectively, from the 393 cases reported from 51 villages during January–June 2012. Of the 89 cases reported during January–June 2013, 83% were from South Sudan. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

Study: Strokes now affecting more younger people, global burden could double by 2030

23 October - Strokes are increasingly hitting younger people and the incidence of the crippling condition worldwide could double by 2030, warns the first global analysis of the problem. Though the chances of a stroke jump dramatically with age, the growing number of younger people with worrying risk factors such as bulging waistlines, diabetes and high blood pressure means they are becoming increasingly susceptible... Scientists combed through more than 100 studies from 1990 to 2010 studying stroke patients across the world and also used modeling techniques when there wasn't enough data. They found the incidence of stroke has jumped by a quarter in people aged 20 to 64 and that those patients make up almost one-third of the total number of strokes. [Washington Post](#)

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The pros and cons of social media in global health

21 October - I was invited to moderate a panel at the World Health Summit in Berlin...[that focused on] social media's role in global health... Let me start with what were identified as the contributions of social media to health. The most overwhelming is social media's reach and their ability to multiply audience figures with a previously inconceivable efficiency... In addition, there is also the holy grail of public health-behaviour change. The potency of social media to leverage influence is well documented. This is because, in the current generation of platforms, the social element is a more important driver of communication than the media one... Interestingly, however, there were more risks to emerge from the discussion than opportunities, with six issues highlighted. [allAfrica](#)

WHO: Drug-resistant TB diagnoses are rising

23 October – Drug-resistant tuberculosis has become a public health crisis, the World Health Organization declared Wednesday, with the number of people diagnosed with the deadly airborne disease rising so fast that some countries don't have enough drugs or medical staff to treat them all. And the vast majority—around four-fifths—of drug-resistant TB cases are still going undetected, the United Nations public health agency said in its latest annual report on TB, calling targets for diagnosing and treating the disease “far off-track.” ...New, rapid molecular tests are helping doctors and public-health authorities diagnose drug-resistant TB more widely and effectively than ever before, producing a sharp rise in the number of cases in 2012, the WHO reported. [Wall Street Journal](#)

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INFLUENZA

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

All data are preliminary and may change as more reports are received.

This FluView is in the abbreviated format due to the partial government shut-down from October 1-16, 2013.

During week 41 (October 6-12, 2013), influenza activity remained low in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 3,534 specimens tested, 166 (4.7%) were positive for influenza.
- Novel Influenza A Virus: One human infection with a novel influenza A virus was reported.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the epidemic threshold. [FluView](#)

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During weeks 40 & 41, 69 specimens were received from 33 locations. Results were finalized for 20 specimens from 17 locations. There were three specimens positive for

influenza (one A(H1N1)pdm09, one A(H3N2), and one B/lineage unknown). Other respiratory pathogens identified were two parainfluenza, nine rhinovirus/enterovirus, one human metapneumovirus, and two *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*.

- During the 2013-2014 influenza surveillance year, USAFSAM will be testing all influenza A/B PCR negative specimens on the FilmArray® Respiratory Panel. The FilmArray® is able to detect 20 respiratory pathogens. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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

- During week 41/2013, all 24 reporting countries experienced low-intensity influenza activity and geographic spread was reported as local or sporadic by four countries and the UK (Scotland).
- Of 220 sentinel specimens collected by 16 countries, one (0.5%) tested positive for influenza virus A.
- Since week 40/2013, three hospitalised laboratory-confirmed influenza cases have been reported by Ireland and the UK.

During the two first weeks of the 2013–2014 influenza surveillance season, influenza activity in Europe has remained at inter-season levels. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Flu shots may reduce risk of heart attacks, strokes and even death

22 October - ...For some time, researchers have suspected that flu shots can protect heart health as well as respiratory health. They have tested this theory in a handful of clinical trials, and the results have been mixed. Now an international group of researchers has compiled data from a dozen randomized clinical trials to see if they could get a clearer answer to the question. What they found was “a consistent association between influenza vaccination and a lower risk of cardiovascular events,” according to their report in Wednesday’s edition of the Journal of the American Medical Assn. Five of the trials the team examined were published in peer-reviewed journals and compared a flu vaccine to a placebo vaccine or other type of control. In those trials, 3,238 patients got a real vaccine and 95 of them – 2.9% – went on to experience “a major adverse cardiovascular event,” the JAMA report said. For the sake of comparison, 3,231 patients in those trials got a placebo or control and 151 of them – or 4.7% – later had a cardiovascular event, according to the study. [Los Angeles Times](#)

Google.org: Flu Trends

24 October - Estimates of flu activity based on certain Internet search queries indicate that the level of flu activity in the northern hemisphere is primarily low but moderate in Russia and in the southern hemisphere ranges from minimal to low. [Google.org Flu Trends](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

Week 42 (through 19 October 2013):

- Influenza: One new case of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (type B) among U.S. military basic trainees.
- Adenovirus: Sporadic adenovirus cases at basic training centers in 2013. FRI rates remain low in general.
- 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](#)

Update: Influenza activity — United States and worldwide, May 19–September 28, 2013

25 October - During May 19–September 28, 2013, the United States experienced low levels of seasonal influenza activity overall. Influenza A (H1N1) pdm09 (pH1N1), influenza A (H3N2), and influenza B viruses were detected worldwide and were identified sporadically in the United States. In June, influenza A (H3N2) variant viruses (H3N2)v were first detected in Indiana, and between June 18 and September 28, a total of 20 cases of influenza A variant viruses ([H3N2]v and influenza A (H1N1) variant [H1N1]v) were reported from five states. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 12 October 2013 (Week 41)

- Influenza-like illness (ILI) activity is low in both Army and civilian populations. All beneficiaries aged 6 months and older should receive this year's influenza vaccine, unless medically exempted.
- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 41 were 62% lower than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Zero hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in week 41, and zero hospitalized cases have been reported during this influenza season.
- Acute Respiratory Disease at BCT sites: ARD rates remain low; rates did not increase significantly at any sites during week 41.
- Viral specimens: During week 41, 36 of 482 (7%) laboratory specimens tested were positive for respiratory pathogens. Parainfluenza accounted for 42% of positive specimens. 66% of the influenza A positive specimens were submitted by SRMC. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Cambodia confirms H5N1 in 8-year-old girl

22 October - An 8-year-old girl in Cambodia has become the country's 21st H5N1 avian flu case-patient this year, according to a detailed statement today from Cambodia's Ministry of Health (MoH) and the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Western Pacific Region... She was treated with oseltamivir (Tamiflu) on Oct 14 and is now in stable condition, the statement said. Testing by the country's Pasteur Institute found her positive for H5N1 on Oct 17. MoH rapid response teams in O-Raing found that the girl had direct contact with dead poultry when she helped prepare a meal using a chicken that had died earlier. Of Cambodia's 21 H5N1 cases this year, 11 have been fatal. [CIDRAP News Scan](#)

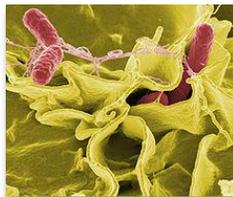
Human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus – update

24 October - The National Health and Family Planning Commission, China notified WHO of a new laboratory-confirmed case of human infection with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus. The patient is a 67-year-old man from Zhejiang Province. He is a farmer, and has had contact with live poultry. He became ill on 16 October 2013, was admitted to a local township hospital on 18 October 2013, and was transferred to another hospital on 21 October 2013 as his condition deteriorated. He is currently in a critical condition. To date, WHO has been informed of a total of 137 laboratory-confirmed human cases with avian influenza A(H7N9) virus infection including 45 deaths. Currently, four patients are hospitalized and 88 have been discharged. So far, there is no evidence of sustainable human-to-human transmission. [WHO](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

CDC reports 338 multi-drug resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg infections



24 October - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced on Tuesday that a total of 338 people have developed multi-drug resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg infections. Reports of infected persons have come from 20 U.S. States and Puerto Rico; the majority of cases, approximately 75 percent, were reported from California. Local, state and federal organizations are currently conducting investigations to trace the infection's source, which is believed to be Foster Farms brand chicken. Foster Farms supplies Costco's El Camino Real store in South San Francisco. [Vaccine News Daily](#)

FDA to vets: Watch out for jerky pet treats; some linked to illness, death

23 October - If you feed your pet a jerky treat and it gets sick or dies, the Food and Drug Administration wants to hear from you. The agency says it has reports of more than 3,600 dogs and 10 cats that got sick after eating jerky pet treats over the past six years and 580 of those pets have died. The FDA isn't naming any particular brand, but says the animals mostly ate a chicken or duck jerky treat or a jerky-wrapped treat. The FDA has already tested 1,200 samples without discovering the exact cause of any illnesses. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, a lack of appetite and sluggishness. "Most of the jerky treats implicated have been made in China," the FDA said on its website. If a pet gets sick after eating such treats, the FDA wants owners to keep the leftover treats for 60 days in case it wants a sample, and veterinarians should report any jerky treat-related cases. [CNN](#)

Survey shows human milk bought online often tainted

21 October - Human milk bought via the Internet stands a good chance of being contaminated with high levels of pathogenic bacteria, according to a study published today in *Pediatrics*. A team of researchers from Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, and other Ohio institutions bought 101 breast milk samples from a popular US milk-sharing Web site and tested them for bacteria. They also tested 20 samples of unpasteurized milk donated to a milk bank. [CIDRAP](#)

Texas Cyclospora outbreak probe points to Mexican cilantro



23 October - Further investigation of the recent multistate *Cyclospora* outbreak suggests that at least some of the many cases in Texas were related to fresh cilantro from Mexico, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported in an update today. The CDC said that was the conclusion of an investigation of cases associated with three Mexican style restaurants and one grocery store in Texas. The cilantro came from Puebla, Mexico, the agency said. Texas has had by far the most cases in the outbreak or outbreaks—278. [CIDRAP](#)

U.S.: 22,000 pounds of meat recalled; possible Listeria

[23 October](#) - More than 22,000 pounds of chicken, ham and beef products are being recalled because of possible Listeria contamination, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said. The products were sent to retailers and distributors in Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming, the USDA said in a statement Tuesday. They were also distributed in Canada, the Food and Drug

Administration said. The recall covers about 109,000 cases of refrigerated ready-to-eat products. The potential contamination was discovered by testing at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, officials said. "A traceback investigation and follow-up testing by FDA at the facility determined there was potential cross contamination of products with *Listeria monocytogenes* from product contact surfaces." [CNN](#)

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WELLNESS

FDA warns against 'illegal' colored contact lenses for Halloween



24 October - Though a pair of red or white-colored contact lenses may add an extra "wow" factor to your Halloween costume this year, officials are warning that many of these lenses are illegal and could even cause blindness, UPI.com reported. Government officials from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Office of Criminal Investigations, along with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations and U.S. Customs and Border Protection are currently in the midst of "Operation Double Vision" – a mission aimed at seizing counterfeit or illegally imported lenses not approved by the FDA. Officials warn that these unregulated lenses can do serious damage to a person's eyes... To avoid encountering counterfeit lenses, consumers should not buy contacts from Halloween shops, novelty shops, beauty stores or online vendors that don't require a prescription, according to UPI.com.

[Fox News](#)

Great-grandmother's pesticide exposure might make you fat

24 October - The exposure to environmental toxicants from generations past might be a contributing factor to the current obesity epidemic, according to a study from Washington State University published in the journal BMC Medicine. The study looked at the effect of exposure to the insecticide DDT... on female rats and their offspring. Researchers did not notice any significant health changes in the oldest set of female rats, despite being injected with the insecticide. In fact, no significant health changes were observed in their offspring (the first generation), or the rats born to *that* offspring (the second generation). But the third generation of rats born of the same lineage saw more than 50 percent of males and females develop obesity. Obesity observed in humans and rats have similar associations. [G]reat-grandchildren could face an increased inherited risk of obesity and associated diseases, such as ovarian disease, testis disease and kidney disease, researchers said. [The Weather Channel](#)

High-normal blood sugar tied to memory lapses

24 October - Even if they're still within the normal range, higher glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c) levels may be associated with poorer performance on certain cognitive tests and with differences in hippocampal structure, German researchers found. Among healthy middle-age and older adults with mean HbA1c levels of 5.8%, each standard deviation increase in HbA1c was associated with significant declines in delayed recall, learning ability, and memory consolidation... They added that "lifestyle strategies" to achieve strict glucose control could prevent age-related cognitive decline, even in individuals with HbA1c levels currently considered normal -- a hypothesis that should be tested in future trials, they noted. [MedPage Today](#)

Krokodil use reportedly spreading: What makes dangerous drug so addictive?

22 October - More cases of Krokodil use are reportedly popping up around the United States, prompting some medical professionals to warn that the addictive, poisonous drug has reached American shores... Krokodil, scientific name desomorphine, is an opiate in the same family as heroin, oxycodone and codeine. Krokodil has a faster onset, shorter duration of high and is more potent than morphine... Krokodil has grown in popularity, especially in Russia, where heroin addiction is rampant. About 1 million users are estimated to be abusing the drug in Russia... [T]he drug is easy to produce at home with codeine, gasoline, paint thinner and a few other ingredients. Codeine is sold over-the-counter in Russia, and addicts can easily purchase these items necessary to cook the drug. The finished product isn't purified and may contain toxic substances left over from the cooking process, which cause tissue damage to the veins and flesh and can result in gangrene, or body tissue that rots and dies. [CBS News](#)

Slow metabolism 'obesity excuse' true

24 October - A team at the University of Cambridge has found the first proof that mutated DNA does indeed slow metabolism. The researchers say fewer than one in 100 people are affected and are often severely obese by early childhood. The findings, [published in the journal Cell](#), may lead to new obesity treatments even for people without the mutation. Scientists at the Institute of Metabolic Science, in Cambridge, knew that mice born without a section of DNA, a gene called KSR2, gained weight more easily. But they did not know what effect it may be having in people, so they analysed the DNA of 2,101 severely obese patients. Some had mutated versions of KSR2. It had a twin effect of increasing their appetite while their slowing metabolism. [BBC News](#)

Study: HPV vaccine may lower cervical defects

22 October - A human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign in Victoria, Australia, schools was associated with a significant reduction of cervical abnormalities within 5 years, according to a study today in *BMC Medicine*. The study involved 14,085 unvaccinated and

24,871 vaccinated women who were eligible for vaccination at school starting in 2007, 85% of whom had received three HPV vaccine doses. The researchers found that histologically confirmed high-grade (HG) cervical abnormalities and high-grade cytology (HGC) were significantly lower for vaccinated women. Those who received at least one vaccine dose had an HG rate of 4.8 per 1,000 person-years, compared with 6.4 per 1,000 person-years in unvaccinated women. [CIDRAP News Scan](#)

Time to end the war against saturated fat?

22 October - The British Medical Journal has issued a clarion call to all who want to ward off heart disease: Forget the statins and bring back the bacon (or at least the full-fat yogurt). Saturated fat is not the widow-maker it's been made out to be, writes British cardiologist Aseem Malhotra in a stinging "Observations" column in the BMJ: The more likely culprits are empty carbs and added sugar. Virtually all the truths about preventing heart attacks that physicians and patients have held dear for more than a generation are wrong and need to be abandoned, Malhotra writes. He musters a passel of recent research that suggests that the "obsession" with lowering a patients' total cholesterol with statins, and a public health message that has made all sources of saturated fat verboten to the health-conscious, have failed to reduce heart disease. [Los Angeles Times](#)

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USAFRICOM

Niger: Drop in child deaths, says Save the Children

23 October - Niger has made the greatest strides worldwide in reducing child mortality, a new study by Save the Children suggests. Other countries that reported progress in tackling child deaths include Liberia and Rwanda, the charity said. Child mortality rates in Niger fell by almost two thirds because of government policies to curb hunger and poor healthcare, it added. Niger was hit by a severe drought in 2005, causing widespread hunger. It led to aid agencies launching an international campaign to feed hundreds of thousands of people. However, Niger has managed to reduce the deaths of children under the age of five from 326 in 1,000 in 1990 to 114 in 1,000 in 2012, Save the Children says... At the other end of the spectrum lie Haiti, Papua New Guinea and Equatorial Guinea with slow and unequal reductions in under-five mortality rates." [BBC News](#)

Kenya: Bias against sex workers holds back HIV campaign

21 October - The gains made in the fight against HIV/Aids may be reversed if nothing is done to accommodate the most at risk populations that have been shown to contribute greatly to the pandemic, experts warn. Dubbed Marps, the group, which includes men

having sex with men, commercial sex workers, injectable drug users and the homosexual community, has reported rising infection rates. The National Aids Control Council is warning that continued discrimination and criminalisation of this group will only serve to scare its members away from accessing vital services, while continuing to put their lives at risk. [The Star](#)

Uganda: Unsafe abortions kill 1,500 women a year

22 October - Every year, about 1,500 girls in Uganda die from complications resulting from unsafe abortion contributing to the slow progress to reduce the number of women who die due to pregnancy-related complications. "Abortion is hidden in the heamorrhage and sepsis figures but it is not captured. They hide it there because of the stigma," says Dr Charles Kiggundu, the new president of the Association of Gynaecologists and obstetricians of Uganda... Heamorrhage (excessive bleeding) and Sepsis (infection) are the leading causes of pregnancy-related deaths of women accounting for 26% and 22% of maternal deaths respectively. But 2008 Ministry of Health statistics estimated that abortion-related causes account for 26% of maternal deaths in the country. [New Vision](#)

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USCENTCOM

Pakistan: Three new polio cases as world observes Polio Day

24 October - As the world observed Polio Day today, three new cases were confirmed in Pakistan, one of the few countries where the crippling disease continues to be endemic. This took the total number of cases in Pakistan this year to 49, a development that threatens to derail global efforts to root out the disease. Last year, 58 cases were reported across the country. The National Institute of Health confirmed that three children were affected by the polio virus, including two from the restive tribal areas and one from Sheikhpura in Punjab, The Express Tribune reported. [Business Standard](#)

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

24 October - WHO has been informed of two laboratory-confirmed cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection in Saudi Arabia on 18 and 19 October 2013, and three laboratory-confirmed cases in 18 September 2013. Of the five laboratory-confirmed cases, two died. The ages of the five patients range from 35 to 83 years old; four men and one woman; two from Medinah and three Riyadh. Four patients had underlying medical conditions. Two patients reported having no contact with a laboratory-

confirmed case or with animals prior to becoming ill. Globally, from September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a total of 144 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including 62 deaths. [WHO](#)

Syria: At least 22 people suspected of having polio - WHO

24 October - At least 22 people are suspected of having polio in Syria, the first outbreak of the crippling viral disease in 14 years, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Thursday. Most of those stricken with acute flaccid paralysis, a symptom of diseases including polio, in Deir al-Zor province are children under the age of two, WHO spokesman Oliver Rosenbauer said. More than 100,000 children under the age of five are deemed at risk of polio in the eastern province... The city of Deir al-Zor is partially controlled by Syrian government forces while the countryside around it is in the hands of rebels fighting to remove President Bashar al-Assad. [Reuters](#)

Syria: In Syria, doctors risk life and juggle ethics

21 October - Syria's civil war has been especially dangerous for health professionals; a United Nations report issued last month described the "deliberate targeting of hospitals, medical personnel and transports" as "one of the most alarming features of the Syrian conflict." By varying estimates, more than 100 doctors have been killed and as many as 600 have been imprisoned. The country's once-functioning health system is in a shambles. More than half of its public hospitals have been damaged in the two-year-old civil war and 37 percent are out of service entirely, according to a recent report by the World Health Organization. Many Syrian doctors have fled; those who remain describe dire conditions where even the most basic care is not available. [New York Times](#)

UN: Violence against women in Afghanistan 'pandemic'



22 October - ... Since the 2001 fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan has made important strides in promoting women's rights, the protection of women and girls, and the participation of women in decision-making... Despite a robust legal framework regarding women's rights, female Afghans still suffer widespread discriminatory cultural practices... Violence against women and girls is exceptionally high in Afghanistan and is almost at a pandemic level, with up to 87.2 percent of women having experienced some form of violence, such as physical, psychological, sexual, economic violence, social abuse as well as forced and early marriage... In Afghanistan, attacks against women and girls have increased at a frightening pace. In 2012, female casualties increased by 20 percent in spite of a decrease of overall violence, and this year by 61 percent, according to the UN. [Deutsche Welle](#)

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Russia's top breast-feeding expert arrested for running a 'cult'

21 October – [O]n Friday, Oct. 18, when Russian police announced the arrest of an alleged cult leader, local media splashed the news across the headlines. The only problem was the supposed cult turned out to be a pre-natal center, and its director, Zhanna Tsaregradskaya, had never claimed to have any occult powers. She merely taught seminars on breast-feeding and natural births. According to the statement released on Friday by Russia's counter-extremism police, the Rozhana Center, which was founded in 1989 to help re-introduce home births in Russia, was actually "a sect with a strict hierarchical structure." [T]he center encourages mothers to breast-feed their newborns, and it provides training courses for midwives and expecting mothers to give birth at home instead of at a hospital, according to the center's website and its former clients. [Time](#)

Sweden: How Sweden's new text message plan is saving cardiac arrest victims

23 October - By using text messages, the city of Stockholm, Sweden is getting emergency responders to cardiac arrest victims faster. Here's how it works. Volunteers who are trained in CPR are added to a network called SMSlivräddare, (or SMSLifesaver). When a resident dials 112 (the equivalent of 911 in the states), a text message is sent to all CPR volunteers who are within 500 meters of the person needing emergency care. This way, a volunteer may get to the patient faster than an ambulance. [Time](#)

United Kingdom: Breast cancer 'worse' in young, black women

22 October - Young black women in the UK are more likely than their white counterparts to develop "worse" breast cancer with a poorer prognosis, research suggests. This group has larger, more aggressive tumours with a higher risk of recurrence. This is despite having the same access to treatment, the study in the British Journal of Cancer shows. As yet unidentified biological factors may be to blame, say the Cancer Research UK investigators. Such women might respond less well to breast cancer drugs like tamoxifen because of the genetic make-up of their tumour, they say. The research team, based at the University of Southampton, looked at data from nearly 3,000 UK women - of whom 118 were black - who were younger than 40 when they were diagnosed with breast cancer. [BBC News](#)

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Mexico: Cholera

19 October - The Ministry of Health in Mexico has reported 171 confirmed cases, including one death, of infection with *Vibrio cholerae* O1 Ogawa toxigenic between 9 September to 18 October 2013. In the second week of September 2013, Mexico was affected simultaneously by a hurricane and tropical storm which caused heavy rains, floods, landslides and internal displacement of populations, thus increasing the risk of diarrhoeal diseases... This is the first local transmission of cholera recorded since the 1991-2001 cholera epidemic in Mexico. The genetic profile of the bacterium obtained from patients in Mexico presents high similarity (95 percent) with the strain that is currently circulating in three Caribbean countries (Haiti, Dominican Republic and Cuba). [WHO](#)

U.S.: 5 things we didn't know about the fungal outbreak last year

24 October - Health officials are still learning from the fungal outbreak tied to tainted steroid pain injections made at the now-shuttered New England Compounding Company. Researchers now know that most patients' immune systems didn't try to fight off the deadly fungi as it burrowed into their spinal columns – called duras -- and wreaked havoc, according to one of two scientific journal articles published in the New England Journal of Medicine to review the outbreak. The outbreak that sickened 750 people since last fall was unprecedented -- first, because only people who received a tainted steroid injection were at risk; and, second, because the fungus wasn't known for making people sick, let alone causing a deadly inflammatory disease and other infections that killed 64 people so far... Although there have been no new infections since July, the outbreak sickened 750 patients, killing 64 of them, according to the CDC. [ABC News](#)

U.S.: A superbug outbreak at NIH

22 October - Drug-resistant bacteria lurks in hospitals: in sink drains, on equipment passed from room-to-room, on door handles, on the hands of clinicians and hospital workers, and in ventilators and tubes. One particularly dangerous bug, *Klebsiella pneumoniae carbapenemase*, or KPC, has been found in American hospitals in 44 states so far. That's likely an underestimate, since there is no national reporting system to track outbreaks of drug-resistant bacteria at hospitals. In 2011, KPC came to one of the nation's flagship research hospitals, the Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, known as the NIH. What followed was an outbreak even they still can't fully explain... [T]rack how they believe the bug may have spread. [PBS](#)

U.S.: Ex-doc sentenced to life in Vegas hep C case

24 October - A former Las Vegas endoscopy clinic owner was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole after 18 years, following his criminal convictions in a 2007

hepatitis C outbreak believed to be one of the largest in the U.S. Clark County District Court Judge Valerie Adair sentenced Dipak Desai, 63, on Thursday. The former state medical board member was found guilty in July of 27 criminal charges, including second-degree murder, in a viral outbreak that officials traced to his clinics... Former nurse-anesthetist Ronald Lakeman, 66, was also sentenced Thursday to seven to 21 years in prison, according to the Review-Journal. He was spared a murder conviction... but found guilty of 16 charges including insurance fraud, criminal neglect, reckless disregard, obtaining money under false pretenses and theft. [Seattle Post Intelligencer](#)

U.S.: FDA recommends tightening access to hydrocodone pain-killers

24 October - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Thursday recommended tighter restrictions on products that contain hydrocodone, an opioid painkiller present in commonly prescribed, potentially addictive drugs such as Vicodin. Until now, Vicodin and other products that contain less than 15 milligrams of hydrocodone have been classified as Schedule III controlled substances. The FDA recommends reclassifying them more restrictively -- potentially as Schedule II products, in line with opioid pain-killers such as oxycodone and morphine. Reclassifying the products would make them harder to obtain, both by addicts and by legitimate pain patients. Physicians are not allowed to call in a prescription for a Schedule II product to a pharmacy. Instead, patients must present a written prescription. In addition, patients would not be allowed as many refills before returning to see their doctors, potentially representing a hardship for patients in chronic pain. The proposed change was urged by the Drug Enforcement Administration, which is battling a rising tide of prescription drug abuse. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Health care law fails to lower prices for rural areas

23 October - As technical failures bedevil the rollout of President Obama's health care law, evidence is emerging that one of the program's loftiest goals — to encourage competition among insurers in an effort to keep costs low — is falling short for many rural Americans. While competition is intense in many populous regions, rural areas and small towns have far fewer carriers offering plans in the law's online exchanges. Those places, many of them poor, are being asked to choose from some of the highest-priced plans in the 34 states where the federal government is running the health insurance marketplaces. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: New Maryland mental health initiative focuses on identifying and treating psychosis

21 October - ... The [Washington Navy Yard] tragedy and others like it have left those in the mental health field, along with the rest of the nation, wondering why the tragedy happened — and how to prevent the next mass shooting. Some states, including Maryland, have responded by tightening gun-control laws and augmenting programs to help the mentally ill. But Maryland also has decided to focus specifically on psychosis.... [T]he Center for

Excellence on Early Intervention for Serious Mental Illness has a goal of identifying psychosis in a fresh way: by taking notice in the earliest stages and providing support before symptoms spiral out of control... Organizers say the result is a multidisciplinary service that can identify young people at high risk for developing psychosis — the center works with people between 12 and 22, a prime age for first onset — and provides a "continuum of care" for anyone who needs it. [Baltimore Sun](#)

U.S.: Obesity rate levels off, but still an epidemic

18 October - Obesity among U.S. adults is continuing to level off after several decades of skyrocketing growth, new government data show. In 2012, about 34.9% of the people in this country were obese, which is roughly 35 pounds over a healthy weight. That is not significantly different from the 35.7% who were obese in 2010. In both 2010 and 2012 about 78 million adults were obese. [USA Today](#)

U.S.: West Nile virus - Preliminary maps & data for 2013

As of October 22, 2013, 48 states and the District of Columbia have reported West Nile virus infections in people, birds, or mosquitoes. A total of 1,927 cases of West Nile virus disease in people, including 73 deaths, have been reported to CDC. Of these, 938 (49%) were classified as neuroinvasive disease (such as meningitis or encephalitis) and 989 (51%) were classified as non-neuroinvasive disease. [CDC](#)

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Australia: Military exercise sparked big wildfire

23 October - A military training exercise ignited the largest of the wildfires that have ravaged Australia's most populous state over the past week, investigators said Wednesday. More than 100 fires have killed one man and destroyed more than 200 homes in New South Wales state since Thursday. Fire investigators found that a massive fire near the city of Lithgow, west of Sydney, began Oct. 16 at a nearby Defense Department training area, and that the blaze "was started as a result of live ordnance exercises" at the army range, the Rural Fire Service said in a statement. The fire has burned 180 square miles and destroyed several houses, but no injuries or deaths have been reported in the blaze. It was downgraded from the highest emergency category on Wednesday. [USA Today](#)

Australia: Obesity problem most acute in rural areas

23 October - People in some rural areas of NSW are three times as likely to be obese as residents of Sydney's north shore, according to data to be released on Thursday. Sydney's north shore and northern beaches have the lowest obesity rate in the nation, at 14 per cent, according to the figures from the National Health Performance Authority, which detail for

the first time how the size of the obesity problem varies between different parts of the country. [Sydney Morning Herald](#)

South Korea, US to set up bioweapon monitoring of North Korea

22 October - South Korea and the United States will establish a surveillance system against biological weapon threats from North Korea, Seoul-based The Chosun Ilbo reported today. South Korea's Defense Ministry said the contract to build a monitoring system against biological weapons was signed Oct 18. The system will be designed to detect about 10 potential bioterror agents such as anthrax and smallpox, the story stated. The agreement will enable South Korea to receive information on disease threats and vaccines from the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, while the United States will benefit from real-time information gathered by the new surveillance system. [CIDRAP News Scan](#)

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Epidemiological alert: Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome

17 October - In the Americas, hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) has been registered in the past years in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, the United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela... Given increasing hantavirus infection cases in some countries of the Region in 2012 and early 2013, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) / World Health Organization (WHO) recommends Member States continue efforts of detection, investigation, reporting, and case management for the prevention and control of infections caused by hantavirus. [PAHO/WHO](#)

Nicaragua: Dengue on the rise

24 October - Nicaragua is facing one of its worst spikes in dengue in recent years, with more than 4,200 reported cases nationwide, including 12 deaths. In Managua alone, there are 1,579 reported cases of dengue, including 79 people who have been hospitalized with the mosquito-borne disease, according to La Prensa's citation of health officials. [Nicaragua Dispatch](#)

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The *Army Public Health Weekly Update* is published by the Health Information Operations Program, Deputy Chief of Staff for Communication, United States Army Public Health Command.

