29 March 2013
Army Public Health Weekly Update

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

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Returning Home from Iraq and Afghanistan: Assessment of Readjustment Needs of Veterans, Service Members, and Their Families

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been the longest sustained U.S. military operations since the Vietnam era, sending more than 2.2 million troops into battle, and resulting in more than 6,600 deaths and 48,000 injuries. While many service members return home relatively unscathed and report rewarding experiences, others return with varied complex health conditions and find that readjusting to life at home, reconnecting with family, finding work, or returning to school is an ongoing struggle.

This report presents the IOM’s comprehensive assessment of the physical, psychological, social, and economic effects of deployment on service members, veterans, their families, and their communities.

Human papillomavirus seroprevalence among men entering military service and seroincidence after ten years of service

February 2013 - ...This study characterized HPV acquisition among male military members by evaluating both seroprevalence at entry into service and seroincidence of HPV infection
Potential Health Risks to DOD Firing-Range Personnel from Recurrent Lead Exposure
The Department of Defense (DOD) asked the National Research Council to evaluate potential health risks from recurrent lead exposure of firing-range personnel. Specifically, DOD asked the National Research Council to determine whether current exposure standards for lead on DOD firing ranges protect its workers adequately.

Menu changes serve up a healthier diet for U.S. military
26 March - According to Dr. Jonathan Woodson, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, only about two percent of armed services members had weight problems in the mid-1990s. In 2005, that figure was five percent, which suggests an eight percent increase in obesity amongst military personnel in as many years. The obesity epidemic amongst military personnel could negatively impact operational readiness and jeopardize Department of Defense operations, according to the report. Researchers involved in the report wondered whether the food being served in military cafeterias could be at least partially to blame, as nearly three-quarters of military personnel eat at least one meal a day in garrison cafeterias... The study found that small changes in food service practices and menus in military cafeterias produced significant improvement in soldiers’ nutritional intake. Increasing the availability of fresh fruit, vegetables, whole-grain foods, reducing the availability of foods with high dietary fat and sugar, and offering one main lean meat or vegetarian entrée at lunch and dinner all helped to increase soldiers’ health. Justmeans

GLOBAL

Burn dressing 'lights up' to signal an infection
24 March - Scientists have developed a medical dressing that 'lights up' when a burn is infected. It could be lifesaving in young children with serious burns in whom infections can rapidly become fatal, the Bath researchers said. A prototype dressing, which glows under UV light when it detects harmful bacteria, is featured on BBC science show Bang Goes the Theory. But trials in humans are still some years away. Fast diagnosis of infection in children with burns, such as those caused by scalds from hot drinks, is a big problem for clinicians, the researchers said... They can quickly develop a condition called toxic shock syndrome, which if left untreated can be fatal in half of cases. BBC News

DNA test reveals 80 markers for inherited cancer risk
27 March - More than 80 genetic markers that can increase the risk of developing breast, prostate or ovarian cancer have been found in the largest study of its kind. The DNA of 200,000 people - half of them with cancer and half without - was compared, revealing an
An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the SECRET level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site: http://phc.army.smil.mil

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individual's inherited risk of the diseases. British scientists, who led the research, believe it could lead to a DNA screening test within five years. They also hope it will boost knowledge of how the cancers develop. BBC

GAO report reiterates biolab oversight gaps
26 March – The United States still lacks a way to assess the need for high-containment laboratories and national standards for building and maintaining them, despite 2009 recommendations, according to a report yesterday from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Members of Congress asked the GAO to explore the issues, which come at a time when lab safety has come under scrutiny in light of controversies about dual-use research, especially that involving lab-modified H5N1 avian influenza viruses. The report focuses on biosafety level 3 (BSL-3) and BSL-4 labs, which expanded in number after the 2001 anthrax attacks and growing federal support of research on potential bioterror threats and the medical countermeasure needed to contain them. In September 2009 the GAO issued a report noting that the United States lacked an oversight strategy that would periodically weigh the need for more labs. CIDRAP

J&J recalling more than 2 million blood glucose meters worldwide
25 March - Johnson & Johnson is recalling and replacing more than 2 million meters used to measure blood glucose levels in diabetics due to a failure to operate properly at extremely high glucose readings, the company's LifeScan unit said on Monday. In the United States, about 90,000 OneTouch Verio IQ meters are affected out of some 1.2 million units of that model being recalled worldwide, the company said. Reuters

Novel coronavirus infection – WHO update
26 March - The Robert Koch Institute informed WHO of a new confirmed case of infection with the novel coronavirus (nCoV). The patient was a 73-year-old male from United Arab Emirates, who was transferred from a hospital in Abu Dhabi to Munich by air ambulance on 19 March 2013. He died on 26 March 2013. In the United Kingdom, the index patient in the family cluster reported on 11 February 2013 with travel history to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia prior to his illness, has died. To date, WHO has been informed of a global total of 17 confirmed cases of human infection with nCoV, including 11 deaths. Based on the current situation and available information, WHO encourages all Member States (MS) to continue their surveillance for severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) and to carefully review any unusual patterns. WHO is currently working with international experts and countries where cases have been reported to assess the situation and review recommendations for surveillance and monitoring. WHO

Study: Hospital-onset C diff may raise risk of death in kids significantly
27 March - Children who contracted hospital-onset Clostridium difficile infections had an almost sevenfold greater risk of dying compared with hospitalized children who didn’t contract the disease or those who contracted community-onset C difficile, according to a
large multicenter study yesterday in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*... In addition, the hospital-associated version led to much longer hospital stays (21.6 vs 5.6 days) and much greater standardized costs ($93,600 vs $18,900) compared with community-onset *C. difficile*. CIDRAP News Scan

Will there be enough water for everyone?

22 March - As the global population grows, so does the need for water. The Worldwatch Institute says increased demands for food, energy and industry, along with climate change, could lead to water scarcity in some places. The warning comes on World Water Day, March 22. Worldwatch says billions of people are already facing some kind of water scarcity or shortage. Spokesperson Supriya Kumar said that it's only expected to get worse as the population increases. VOA

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**INFLUENZA**

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

- In Week 11 (through 16 March 2013), ILI and Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) incidence rates continued to decrease in all regions except PACOM where P&I rates increased slightly. This season, there have been 269 reportable medical event (RME) influenza cases among service members (81.8% were vaccinated); an additional 301 cases were reported among other beneficiaries.

- Across the overseas DoD laboratory surveillance network, influenza activity were at low levels except in Europe, where high levels of influenza activity were detected with co-circulation of influenza A/H1, A/H3, and B.

- Current vaccine coverage in the active component of the U.S. Armed Forces is 97%.

**CDC reports about 90 percent of children who died from flu this season not vaccinated**

22 March– The number of influenza-associated pediatric deaths reported to CDC during the current season surpassed 100 this week as an additional 6 deaths were reported in FluView. This brings the total number of influenza-associated pediatric deaths reported to CDC, to date, to 105 for the 2012-2013 season. Pediatric deaths are defined as flu-associated deaths that occur in people younger than 18 years. An early look at this season’s reports indicates that about 90 percent occurred in children who had not received a flu vaccination this season. This review also indicated that 60 percent of deaths occurred in children who were at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications, but 40 percent of these children had no recognized chronic health problems. CDC
CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

- During week 11 (March 10 – 16, 2013), influenza activity remained elevated in the United States, but decreased in most areas.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 5,526 specimens tested and reported by collaborating laboratories, 899 (16.3%) were positive for influenza.

- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was above the epidemic threshold.

- Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths: Six pediatric deaths were reported.

- Outpatient Illness Surveillance: The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 2.2%. This is at the national baseline of 2.2%. Three of 10 regions reported ILI above region-specific baseline levels. One state experienced high ILI activity; 5 states experienced moderate activity. **FluView**

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During Week 11, ending 16 March, 23 specimens were tested from 15 locations. There were four influenza A viruses (three A(H3N2) and one A(H1N1)pdm09); and six influenza B viruses detected (see Table 1).

- To date this influenza season, 3,182 specimens have been tested from 80 locations of which 1,012 were positive for influenza A (906 A(H3N2), 96 A(H1N1)pdm09, five co-infections, and five A/not subtyped).

- To date this influenza season, 255 were positive for influenza B. The onset of influenza B cases compared to influenza A has been somewhat later in the season.

- There have been 211 other respiratory viruses isolated (47 adenovirus, 85 RSV, 70 parainfluenza, and nine enterovirus) cumulatively this season. **USAF School of Aerospace Medicine**

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

In week 11/2013, 19 countries reported medium intensity and 10 countries reported low intensity. No country reported high intensity, indicating declining activity in an increasing number of countries.

- Decreasing or stable trends were reported by 28 countries and an increasing trend was reported by Romania which was the only country where ILI rates have not yet peaked.

- In week 11/2013, 46% of tested specimens were positive for influenza virus. This proportion had remained above 50% since week 4/2013, with a peak of 61% in week 5/2013. However the percentage of positive specimens decreased more sharply between weeks 10 and 11/2013, consistent with declining influenza activity.

- Since week 40/2012, 48% of sentinel specimens testing positive for influenza have been
type A, and 52% type B viruses. Of influenza A viruses subtyped, the proportion of A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses has been 63%.

- In week 11/2012, 116 hospitalised laboratory-confirmed influenza cases were reported by eight reporting countries. Since week 40/2012, 2 605 hospitalised laboratory-confirmed influenza cases and 154 related fatalities have been reported.

In all reporting countries but one, influenza activity continued to decline or had already returned to baseline levels. After more than three months of active transmission, the 2012–2013 influenza season is on the wane. Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview

Google.org: Flu Trends

26 March - Estimates of flu activity based on certain Internet search queries indicate that the level of flu activity in the northern hemisphere ranges from minimal in Bulgaria to high in Sweden and Russia and in the southern hemisphere ranges from minimal to low. Google.org Flu Trends

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 16 March 2013:

- Influenza: Three cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza 1(A/H3), 1(A/H1N1) and 1 (B) among US military basic trainees. Influenza activity at basic training centers is decreasing in March
- Adenovirus: Type 14 adenovirus cases continue at MCRD Parris Island, though FRI rates remain low
- FRI surveillance at eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated elevated FRI rates at CGTC Cape May. NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 16 March 2013 (Week 11)

- Army influenza-like illness (ILI) activity was slightly lower than the same time last season. The proportion of civilian outpatient visits for ILI decreased to the national baseline of 2.2%. Influenza B continues to exceed influenza A among typed specimens in both the Army and civilian populations.
- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 11 were 3% lower than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Five hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in week 11. 90 hospitalized cases have been reported during this influenza season, 78 in dependents and 12 in Active Duty.
- Acute Respiratory Disease at BCT sites: ARD rates remain low; rates did not increase significantly at any sites during week 11.
- Viral specimens: 272 of 1066 (26%) laboratory specimens tested were positive for
respiratory pathogens. Influenza B accounted for 51% of positive specimens. Most of the influenza positive specimens were from ERMC (35%); 24% were from SRMC, and 22% from PRMC. USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

According to CPSI reports of foodborne-illness outbreaks decline by 40%

27 March - Foodborne illness outbreaks are trending downward, according to a new review of outbreaks by the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest. From 2001 to 2010, the latest 10-year period for which data is available, outbreaks related to *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and other dangerous pathogens appear to have decreased by more than 40 percent. Better food safety practices, notably the adoption of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) programs in the meat, poultry, and seafood industries, may have contributed to the decline, says CSPI. But the group cautions that incomplete reporting of outbreaks by understaffed and financially stretched public health agencies may also influence the data.

Food Safety

Congress passes bill to avert meat inspector furloughs

22 March - The House on Thursday passed a continuing resolution that will head off furloughs for U.S. meat inspectors that would have taken place this summer as a result of the sequester... The legislation will allow for the reallocation of $55 million in funds from other parts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the agency’s Food Safety and Inspection Service. This means that federal meat and poultry inspectors will not face furloughs and, consequently, meat plants will keep running without pause through the summer (meat and poultry plants can only operate when a federal inspector is present).

Food Safety News

Kenya: Insecticide-treated nets protect livestock and boost milk yields in UN pilot projects

27 March - Insecticide-treated mosquito and fly nets encircling livestock pens in small farms in western Kenya are proving to be an effective means of killing disease-carrying pests and boosting milk yields, the United Nations today reported, as well as contributing to fewer people being bitten at home. "The nets are environmentally safe and have drastically cut the number of flies, mosquitoes and other disease-transmitting insect vectors by close to 90 per cent," the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a statement, referring to a project in Kisii, Kenya, in the country’s western highlands. The nets have also cut down the cases of mastitis, a bacterial disease that can be spread by flies as well as poor hygiene during milking, according to FAO.

allAfrica
Brain differences seen in people with migraines

26 March - People who suffer migraines may have certain structural differences in pain-related areas of the brain, a new study suggests. Using MRI scans, researchers found that in specific brain regions related to pain processing, migraine sufferers showed a thinner and smaller cortex compared to headache-free adults. The cortex refers to the outer layer of the brain. It's not clear what it all means. But the researchers suspect that certain aspects of brain development may make some people more vulnerable to developing migraines -- and that migraine attacks create further changes in the brain. Medline Plus

Employers try to spur healthy behaviors with health plan rewards

26 March - As employers try to nudge employees toward healthy behaviors, a growing number are taking aim at the medical expense accounts linked to the health plans they offer their workers. And, increasingly, the hefty financial contributions employers are dangling in front of employees are dependent on certain conditions, such whether employees keep their blood pressure in check, for example, or agree to work with a health coach to manage their diabetes. Along with cash and reduced premiums, the contributions are one more way employers are trying to boost participation in health programs. NPR

Liquid drops could replace allergy shots

27 March - In Europe, some allergy sufferers are given sublingual immunotherapy, or allergy drops, to treat their symptoms. These tiny drops of purified allergens - such as pollen or dust mites - are placed under the tongue as an alternative to weekly allergy shots. The drops work like a vaccine, slowly increasing the body's tolerance to the allergen. The Food and Drug Administration has yet not approved these drops for use in the United States, but new evidence published this week by the Journal of the American Medical Association could pave the way for American pharmaceutical companies. CNN

New prostate cancer tests could reduce false alarms

26 March - Sophisticated new prostate cancer tests are coming to market that might supplement the unreliable P.S.A. test, potentially saving tens of thousands of men each year from unnecessary biopsies, operations and radiation treatments. Some of the tests are aimed at reducing the false alarms, and accompanying anxiety, caused by elevated P.S.A. readings. Others, intended for use after a definitive diagnosis, examine the genetic workings of the cancer to distinguish dangerous tumors that need treatment from slow-growing ones that might be left alone. The tests could provide a way out of the bitter debate over whether healthy men should be screened for prostate cancer. New York Times
Online dating for people with sexually transmitted infections

28 March - ... For those with incurable sexually transmitted infections (STIs), are tailored websites the answer for people nervous of telling potential partners about their condition? The past decade has witnessed the growth of niche dating websites - from Amish to Zombie enthusiasts - but a particularly burgeoning sector has been the proliferation of STI dating websites. Now there are so many, there are Top 10 lists. Many have taglines such as "Stay positive! Find Love, Support and Happiness" or "Plenty of Positive Fish". Some sites, such as H-YPE or H-Date, are aimed specifically at people with the most common types of incurable STIs, such as herpes and HPV, which causes genital warts... The rise in these dating sites coincides with increasing rates of STIs. BBC News

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USAFRICOM

Africa: Climate change likely to worsen threat of diarrheal disease in Botswana, arid African countries

26 March - In a National Science Foundation funded study, Kathleen Alexander, an associate professor of wildlife at Virginia Tech, found that climate drives a large part of diarrheal disease and increases the threat of climate change for vulnerable communities... Alexander and colleagues analyzed data on diarrheal disease from 1974, eight years after Botswana gained independence from British rule, through 2003... Botswana is an arid, landlocked country in southern Africa with a subtropical climate of distinct wet and dry seasons. Alexander and her co-authors evaluated monthly reports of diarrheal disease among patients treated at Botswana health facilities since 1974 and compared that data with climatic variables over that same period. "Our analysis suggests that forecasted climate change increases in temperature and decreases in precipitation for the region are likely to increase dry season diarrheal disease incidence, while diarrheal disease incidence in the wet season is likely to decline," Alexander explained. EurekAlert!

Africa: Weaknesses persist in immunization systems

20 March - Immunization systems in Africa still have supply, financing, and sustainability issues and need urgent attention from country leaders to reach the region’s health goals, African experts said yesterday. Three vaccine and infectious disease experts from the University of Cape Town in South Africa raised their concerns in a policy forum in Public Library of Science (PLoS) Medicine. Though they commended African countries for their
progress with immunization systems, they said that outbreaks of diseases such as polio and measles as well as high vaccine dropout rates point to failures within the system. They noted that wide intra- and inter-country differences mean vaccines aren’t reaching large numbers of African children and others are receiving suboptimal doses. CIDRAP

Rwanda: Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda “full”

27 March - Camps in Rwanda hosting thousands of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are running out of space following an influx of people fleeing insecurity in eastern DRC, says a senior government official… At least 25,000 Congolese entered Rwanda from eastern DRC in 2012, according to the Rwandan government. The influx added to the approximately 43,000 refugees - mainly Congolese - already in the country. The ministry noted that there are some refugees willing to be relocated to other places in Rwanda due to security concerns. IRIN

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USCENTCOM

Pakistan: Measles outbreak: 12 more children die in Dir, North Waziristan

28 March - At least 12 children have died because of measles in North Waziristan and Timergara, Lower Dir, while a large number are said to be infected. The exact number of deaths and those infected with measles in North Waziristan could not be ascertained because of the curfew imposed since the suicide attack on Esha check post, which claimed the lives of 17 security personnel and wounded 40 others. However, reports from the troubled region indicate two children from Dossali and Lora Mandi died due to the unavailability of medicines on Tuesday... Over 24 children have died because of the disease since the beginning of the year. Express Tribune

Pakistan security force blocks attack on polio vaccination team

27 March - Pakistani authorities thwarted a plan to attack a polio vaccination team near Karachi yesterday, arresting nine suspects, The News International, a newspaper based in Karachi, reported today. Pakistan Rangers, a paramilitary force that contains members of the Pakistan Army, interrupted the attempt in the Sultanabad area of Karachi and raided five different areas of the city, netting 30 suspects and recovering arms from some. Some of the armed militants were intimidating the polio team with aerial fire, but the troops intervened, according to the report... In other developments, some female polio vaccination workers in
the Swat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, located in the northwestern part of Pakistan near the border with Afghanistan, are refusing security escorts... One of the vaccinators told the Tribune that having police accompany vaccinators makes them more visible and susceptible to attacks. CIDRAP News Scan

Syria’s brain drain – another twist to the country’s crisis

26 March - The exodus of educated and skilled Syrians is increasingly depleting the country’s workforce and the quality of its health services, already strained by two years of conflict. "The phenomenon is ongoing and growing," said regional humanitarian coordinator Radhouane Nouicer. The flight of professionals has affected the bureaucracy, educational institutions and factories - but nowhere is the impact felt more than in the medical sector. Late last year, the World Health Organization said all of the country’s nine psychiatrists and more than half the doctors in Homs had left the country. Clinics run by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent are short of surgeons and other medical experts. IRIN

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USEUCOM

Europe: Drug-resistant TB threatens Europe

22 March - In wealthy regions of the world like Western Europe, the infectious disease tuberculosis often has been seen as a health problem of the past - a deadly bacterial illness, but one that can be cured with antibiotic treatment. Now health experts say drug-resistant tuberculosis is on the rise: the numbers in Britain increased by 25 percent last year, and in Eastern Europe about one-third of all new TB cases are resistant to the key front-line drugs. The Olallo Project in Central London was set up to help homeless people from Central and Eastern Europe get back on their feet by helping them find a place to live and get a job. The charity has evolved, though, to serve another pressing need - tackling tuberculosis among Britain’s migrant community. VOA

European Union in "denial" that sick economy costs lives, health experts say

26 March - Europe’s financial crisis is costing lives, with suicides and infectious diseases on the rise, yet politicians are not addressing the problem, health experts said on Wednesday. Deep budget cuts and growing unemployment are tipping more people into depression, and falling incomes mean fewer people can see their doctors or afford to buy medicines. The result has been a reversal since 2007 of a long-term decline in suicide rates, coupled with worrying outbreaks of diseases including HIV - and even malaria - in Greece, according to an major analysis of European health in The Lancet journal. Reuters
United Kingdom: Food vouchers to provide emergency help but prevent spending on alcohol

26 March - "Food stamps" arrive in Britain next month, when tens of thousands of vulnerable people will be issued with food vouchers in lieu of money to tide them over short-term financial crises. Rather than, as now, offering a cash loan, most councils will from April offer new applicants who qualify for emergency assistance a one-off voucher redeemable for goods such as food and nappies. Many of the 150 local authorities in England running welfare schemes have confirmed that they will issue the vouchers in the form of payment cards, which will be blocked or monitored to prevent the holder using them for alcohol, cigarettes or gambling. Several plan to issue charity food parcels to people applying for crisis help, and are preparing to give cash grants to food banks to enable them to take on full-time staff and increase opening hours. *Economist*

United Kingdom: Swansea measles epidemic - MMR vaccine take-up disappointment

27 March - Health officials say they are very disappointed in the uptake of the MMR vaccine in an area at the centre of a measles epidemic. Public Health Wales said only 100 of the 3,800 susceptible children aged over two in the Swansea area had the vaccine last week. At that rate, it will take two years to vaccinate all those at risk. So far there are 432 cases of measles in total and of those 116 have been reported in the last week alone. Parents have been warned the outbreak could spread to other parts of Wales with fears it could top 1,000 cases. Public Health Wales (PHW) said the epidemic was spreading at an "alarming rate" and that 51 people have been hospitalised so far. *BBC News*

United Kingdom: Young cancer deaths 'halved in last 30 years'

24 March - The number of teenagers and young adults dying from cancer in the UK has halved since the 1970s, according to a report from Cancer Research UK. Deaths fell from about 580 per year to 300 in this age group while the largest drop was in those with leukaemia. More specialised treatments are likely to be behind the trend, the report said. However, a teenage cancer expert said more young people should be enrolled on clinical trials. Cancer remains the main cause of death from any disease in teenagers and young adults. Only transport accidents account for more deaths in this age group. *BBC*
EPA: More than half of US streams and rivers in poor shape

26 March - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says 55 percent of the streams and rivers in the United States are in poor condition for aquatic life. The EPA surveyed thousands of kilometers of waterways and found increased levels of mercury and bacteria. Also found were excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus, which create too much algae, a plant that uses up oxygen that fish need. Additionally, the EPA says many of the waterways lack enough vegetation to prevent flooding, erosion and pollution. The EPA says healthy streams and rivers are vital sources of drinking water and recreation and play a critical role in the economy. VOA

FDA approves first Botulism antitoxin for use in neutralizing all seven known botulinum nerve toxin serotypes

22 March - Product to be stored in Strategic National Stockpile for emergency preparedness and responses. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced today that it has approved Botulism Antitoxin Heptavalent (A, B, C, D, E, F, G)-(Equine) to treat patients showing signs of botulism following documented or suspected exposure to botulinum neurotoxin. The product is derived from horse plasma and contains a mixture of antibody fragments that neutralize all of the seven botulinum nerve toxin serotypes known to cause botulism... "This product approval meets an urgent unmet medical need for the treatment of sporadic cases of life-threatening botulism and provides a medical countermeasure should botulinum nerve toxins be used in a terrorism event," said Karen Midthun, M.D., director of the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research. FDA

U.S. agency puts poison prevention in spotlight

24 March - Parents and caregivers can help reduce the risk of accidental poisonings by storing pesticides and household chemicals in locked cabinets out of children’s reach, experts say. Each year, more than 145,000 reports made to U.S. poison control centers involve pesticides and disinfectants, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). That includes about 65,000 children aged 5 and younger who are accidentally exposed to pesticides each year. More than 10,000 of those incidents involve mouse and rat poisons, the EPA pointed out in a news release issued during National Poison Prevention Week, March 17-23. Medline Plus

29 March - Coccidioidomycosis, also known as valley fever, is an infection caused by inhalation of Coccidioides spp. spores. This soil-dwelling fungus is endemic to arid regions of Mexico, Central and South America, and the southwestern United States... [T]he incidence of reported coccidioidomycosis increased substantially during this period, from 5.3 per 100,000 population in the endemic area (Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah) in 1998 to 42.6 per 100,000 in 2011. Health-care providers should be aware of this increasingly common infection when treating persons with influenza-like illness or pneumonia who live in or have traveled to endemic areas. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: Kids' meals at most restaurant chains fail nutrition test, consumer group says

28 March - The menus offered to children by most U.S. restaurant chains have too many calories, too much salt or fat, and often not a hint of vegetables or fruit, according to a study by the Center for Science in the Public Interest. The group, which has agitated for everything from healthier popcorn at the movies to calorie labeling in supermarkets, found that among almost 3,500 combinations surveyed, kids' meals failed to meet nutritional standards 97 percent of the time. That was a marginal improvement over 2008 when such meals failed to meet standards 99 percent of the time. Huffington Post

U.S.: Meningitis outbreak - New York City advises vaccines for all gay men

23 March - A deadly meningitis outbreak among gay men in New York City just got more serious, officials said today. Two men died of meningitis during the first two months of the year, raising the total number of cases to 22, with 3 of the last 5 cases resulting in death. The city's Department of Health upgraded its response to recommend vaccinations for all gay men throughout the city, regardless of HIV status and geographical location. Medical Daily

U.S.: Norovirus is now the leading cause of severe gastroenteritis in US children

21 March - Norovirus is now the leading cause of acute gastroenteritis among children less than 5 years of age who seek medical care, according to a new study published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Norovirus was responsible for nearly 1 million pediatric medical care visits for 2009 and 2010 in the United States, amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars in treatment costs each year. CDC
U.S.: Prevention and control of meningococcal disease: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)

22 March - ... As a comprehensive summary of previously published recommendations, this report does not contain any new recommendations; it is intended for use by clinicians as a resource. ACIP recommends routine vaccination with a quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MenACWY) for adolescents aged 11 or 12 years, with a booster dose at age 16 years. ACIP also recommends routine vaccination for persons at increased risk for meningococcal disease... Guidelines for antimicrobial chemoprophylaxis and for evaluation and management of suspected outbreaks of meningococcal disease also are provided.

Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: Unfit for work - the startling rise of disability in America

22 March - In the past three decades, the number of Americans who are on disability has skyrocketed. The rise has come even as medical advances have allowed many more people to remain on the job, and new laws have banned workplace discrimination against the disabled. Every month, 14 million people now get a disability check from the government. The federal government spends more money each year on cash payments for disabled former workers than it spends on food stamps and welfare combined. Yet people relying on disability payments are often overlooked in discussions of the social safety net. People on federal disability do not work. Yet because they are not technically part of the labor force, they are not counted among the unemployed. In other words, people on disability don’t show up in any of the places we usually look to see how the economy is doing. But the story of these programs -- who goes on them, and why, and what happens after that -- is, to a large extent, the story of the U.S. economy. It’s the story not only of an aging workforce, but also of a hidden, increasingly expensive safety net. NPR

Australia: Drug-resistant tuberculosis knocks at Australia’s door

25 March - Australia’s first death from XDR-TB — extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis, which is nearly incurable — has alarmed health officials and added new heat to a debate over how to treat immigrants with dangerous diseases. That debate echoes one on the United States’ southern border. A long string of small Australian islands — bits of what was once a land bridge — mingle with islands belonging to Papua New Guinea, one of the
world’s poorest nations. One of those islands, Daru, has a major TB outbreak in its shantytowns. Australia used to have two TB clinics on its islands, but closed them in 2011 and sent many patients back to Daru, instead offering foreign aid to help them be treated at home. New York Times

China's "black clinics" flourish as government debates health reform

27 March - A one-room shack with a single, bare light bulb on a non-descript Beijing side street is 29-year-old Chinese migrant worker Zhang Xuefang’s best recourse to medical care. Not recognized as a Beijing resident, she does not qualify for cheaper healthcare at government hospitals, and her hometown is too far away to take advantage of medical subsidizes there. Like millions of other migrant workers, Zhang, on whose labor China’s economic boom depends, is forced into a seedy and unregulated world of back ally “black clinics” if she falls ill. The issue highlights the two-tier nature of China’s overburdened health care system and goes to the heart of a heated debate about how to reform the contentious "hukou" system of household registration, a cornerstone of government policy for decades which essentially legalizes discrimination between urban and rural residents. The hukou system, which dates to 1958, has split China's 1.3 billion people along urban-rural lines, preventing many of the roughly 800 million Chinese who are registered as rural residents from settling in cities and enjoying basic urban welfare and services. Reuters

India: Cashless treatment for road accident victims

27 March - Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways C.P. Joshi unveiled a pilot project on Tuesday under which road accident victims would be provided cashless treatment, an initiative that could bring down the high rate of fatalities in the country... Under the scheme, cashless treatment of up to Rs. 30,000 would be provided to the victims during the first two days of treatment at 51 hospitals identified on the route at CGHS rates. A maximum of 10 ambulances would be stationed at a distance of about 20 km of each other to respond to an accident within six to seven minutes and take the victims to a nominated hospital. Hindu

India: Sex discrimination begins in the womb

27 March - Women in India are more likely to get prenatal care when pregnant with boys, according to groundbreaking research that has implications for girls’ health and survival. The study... suggests sex discrimination begins in the womb in male-dominated societies... In studying the national health-survey data of more than 30,000 Indians, the researchers found that women pregnant with boys were more likely to go to prenatal medical appointments, take iron supplements, deliver the baby in a healthcare facility (as opposed to in the home) and receive tetanus shots... In India, while it’s illegal for a doctor to reveal the sex of an unborn baby or for a woman to have an abortion based on the baby’s sex, both practices are common, Lakdawala said. Michigan State University
Belize: Hepatitis A

27 March - The Ministry of Health is investigating a cluster of 14 suspected cases of hepatitis A that have occurred over the last 3 weeks in Trio Village, Stann Creek District. One such case has been confirmed by laboratory testing. Hepatitis A is a food and waterborne disease with symptoms that may include yellowing of the eyes and skin, dark urine, light-colored stool along with mild fever, vomiting, diarrhea and loss of appetite among others. This self-limiting disease can also be contracted from close contact with infected individuals.

ProMED-mail

Paraguay: Dengue epidemic still out of control

27 March - The dengue epidemic in Paraguay continues uncontrollable with reports of 1,122 hospitalizations and 39 deaths so far this year. The Directorate of Health Surveillance in the Ministry of Health issued a bulletin which recognizes that the disease continues to rise and said that in the last 24 hours were treated 1,763 suspected cases. The Central Department, near the capital, maintains the highest rate of patients, followed by Asunción and five other departments of this nation.

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