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Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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**Pseudoephedrine:
Legal Efforts to
make it a
Prescription-Only
Drug**

Pseudoephedrine (PSE) is the main ingredient used to make methamphetamine (meth), a highly addictive stimulant drug. PSE is a nasal decongestant typically found in nonprescription cold, allergy, and sinus medications, making it an easy source for people who operate illegal meth labs to obtain this precursor chemical.

To address this issue, statutes and ordinances have been used at federal, state, and local levels as a tool to limit access to PSE.



VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

- CDC finds holes in restaurant food safety systems
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- U.S.: Genetic test maker 23andMe stops marketing after FDA warning
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- U.S.: Winnable Battles Progress Report

CDC: Recognizing and Reporting Serogroup B Meningococcal Disease Associated with Outbreaks at Princeton University and the University of California at Santa Barbara

Increased awareness of meningococcal disease and prompt early case recognition among healthcare providers is critical. If a Princeton University or UCSB student or a person who has had close contact with someone from those university communities develops a fever and headache or rash, meningococcal disease should be suspected; empiric treatment should be considered; blood or cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) cultures should be collected; and suspected cases should be reported to the local health department.

If there is a high degree of clinical suspicion for meningococcal disease, but CSF or blood specimens are sterile, CDC recommends sending specimens to the Meningitis Laboratory at CDC for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing.



USPACOM

- [Australia: Health warning as measles cases triple](#)
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USSOUTHCOM

- [Colombia: FARC peace may cut cocaine, but synthetic drugs new scourge](#)

U.S. MILITARY

Even mild blast injuries tied to long-term brain changes in vets

2 December - Soldiers who suffer mild brain injuries from blasts have long-term changes in their brains, a small new study suggests. Diagnosing mild brain injuries caused by explosions can be challenging using standard CT or MRI scans, the researchers said. For their study, they turned to a special type of MRI called diffusion tensor imaging...The researchers found that the veterans and the comparison group had significant differences in the brain's white matter, which consists mostly of signal-carrying nerve fibers. These differences were linked with attention problems, delayed memory and poorer psychomotor test scores among the veterans. "Psychomotor" refers to movement and muscle ability associated with mental processes. The findings suggest that even mild brain injuries caused by a blast can have long-term effects on the brain. [Medline Plus](#)

GI sex-assault victims face battle for disability benefits

1 December - ...After leaving the military, sexual-assault victims can receive medical care through Veterans Affairs without proving their cases. However, they must meet a tougher standard to qualify for the disability checks that can be a lifeline for veterans who struggle to support themselves. Lawmakers and advocates say that, because troops and veterans often hide sexual assaults, the VA standard for these victims isn't fair. Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), along with the ACLU and Yale Law School's Veterans Legal Services Clinic, found VA disability claims for PTSD due to sexual trauma were granted at a much lower rate from 2008-2012 than for post-traumatic stress due to other causes, such as being in a combat zone. Disability approvals for sexual-trauma cases lagged behind approvals for other PTSD cases by between 17 and 30 percentage points every year, according to VA records, which the organizations obtained in a lawsuit after the VA refused to release the records through a Freedom of Information request. [San Antonio Express-News](#)

Healing Soldiers' most exposed wounds

2 December - As the commander of the Army's dental and trauma research detachment at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Colonel Hale, 57, has helped develop new ways to heal the facial wounds of soldiers returning from combat overseas... [COL Hale says,] in 2008, I

CDC: Winter Weather

When temperatures drop significantly below normal, staying warm and safe can be a challenge. Taking preventive action is your best defense against having to deal with extreme cold-weather conditions.



surveyed our registry of battle injuries sustained by our soldiers and found 27 percent had injuries to the face. A year ago, I did a more comprehensive review. The numbers were between 33 and 40 percent... We think some of the increase may be due to our soldiers' wearing body armor, which protects them from dying outright... We have three areas of emphasis: improving wound healing, restoring the face after burns and bone regeneration. [New York Times](#)

Pentagon makes costly foray into biodefense drug business



24 November – Despite intense pressure to hold down federal spending, the Defense Department is launching a high-priced effort to create its own production pipeline for vaccines and biodefense drugs — an initiative that defies the advice of government-hired experts and duplicates what another agency is doing. Construction began in late October on a plant in north Florida that will produce flu vaccine and specialized medicines for the Pentagon to protect military personnel against germ warfare agents... The Department of Health and Human Services, meanwhile, is on track to spend billions of dollars to produce the same types of medicines in collaboration with private drug companies and university researchers. [Los Angeles Times](#)

Pentagon seeks vaccine against Cold War 'Q-fever'

28 November - The U.S. Defense Department is getting set to push for a new vaccine against "Q-fever" bacteria, an agent with a reputation as a potential terrorism tool acquired in part through its history as a government-made biological weapon. The Pentagon's Defense Threat Reduction Agency is planning an online forum on Dec. 5 to facilitate conversation with potential developers of a vaccine against Q fever, which is also known by the bacteria's formal designation, *Coxiella burnetii*. The United States investigated the agent's warfare potential and the Soviet Union fully weaponized it decades ago, long before both countries formally denounced biological arms in the 1970s. The disease also occurs in nature and has affected hundreds of U.S. troops deployed overseas. [Defense One](#)

Soldier goes on trial over prostitution ring

3 December - Female soldiers at Fort Hood testified Monday that they were recruited for a prostitution ring set up by a sergeant involved in the sexual assault and harassment program at the Central Texas post. The testimony came as the court-martial began for another Fort Hood soldier accused of using the service, which Army prosecutors said preyed upon young, cash-strapped female soldiers at Fort Hood. [USA Today](#)

Violence against Women

- An infographic from the World Health Organization on violence against women.



- An application from the World Health Organization on violence against women.

16 ideas for addressing violence against women in the context of the HIV epidemic: A programming tool

SAFE. Empower. Prevent. Protect

This is the first digital magazine on ending sexual violence created by Together, For Girls.



Syncope, active and reserve components, U.S. Armed Forces, 1998-2012

November - Syncope (fainting) is a temporary loss of consciousness due to sudden reduction of blood flow to the brain. Syncope is relatively common, even among young, healthy adults such as military members... During the period of 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2012, the health care records of 153,172 active component service members documented at least one health care encounter with a diagnosis of "syncope and collapse" (overall incidence rate of 7.2 cases per 1,000 person-years). The annual incidence rates rose by 89 percent during the period. During the 15-year surveillance period, there were 4,954 instances of a documented health care encounter with a diagnosis of syncope on the same day that the service member had received an immunization by injection... For both syncope diagnoses in general and syncope associated with immunization, rates were higher among women than men and were highest among those under age 20. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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GLOBAL

135 million people worldwide will have dementia by 2050: Report

5 December - The number of people worldwide living with dementia could more than triple by 2050, a new report reveals. Currently, an estimated 44 million people worldwide have dementia. That number is expected to reach 76 million in 2030 and 135 million by 2050. Those estimates come from an Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) policy brief for the upcoming G8 Dementia Summit in London, England. The projected number of people with dementia in 2050 is now 17 percent higher than ADI estimated in the 2009 World Alzheimer Report. The new policy brief also predicts a shift in the worldwide distribution of dementia cases, from the richest nations to middle- and low-income countries. By 2050, 71 percent of people with dementia will live in middle- and low-income nations, according to the experts. [US News and World Report](#)

Allergy to red meat linked to tick bites

2 December - Red meat allergy strongly correlated with tick bites and B-negative blood type, according to a Swedish study. All but two of the 39 patients with a documented clinical history of meat allergy and immunoglobulin E (IgE) against the sugar galactose- α -1,3-galactose (alpha-gal) found in beef, lamb, pork, and other mammalian meats had IgE sensitization to ticks as well. All but two (95%) also had an A or O blood type, which was higher than the expected 82% rate of B-negative blood type within the general Swedish

Hand Guide to Portion Control

In a world of whopping portions, cleaning your plate can be a step in the wrong direction. This 'handy' guide offers a few 'rules of thumb' to measure the serving size of food items, whether in the mess hall or during a night on the town.



Classified Version of the Weekly Update

An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the **SECRET** level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site:

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

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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

population, Marianne van Hage, MD, PhD, of the Karolinska Institutet and University Hospital in Stockholm, and colleagues found. [MedPage Today](#)

Earthquake woes include cardiac arrest

2 December - People who escaped the immediate destruction caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake -- and resulting tsunami -- on March 11, 2011 were not out of the woods, as illustrated by significantly elevated rates of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in the weeks following the disaster... [R]esearchers looked at data from adult patients transferred to centers in the hardest hit prefectures after an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest from 4 weeks before to 8 weeks after March 11, 2011. They compared rates of cardiac arrest during each week with the expected rates for 2011 and the preceding 6 years. The risk of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest was significantly elevated for the week following the earthquake (risk ratio 1.70) and for each of the 3 subsequent weeks (RRs 1.48, 1.47, and 1.26) before returning to the expected rate. No such deviations surrounding that date were seen in the previous 6 years. [MedPage Today](#)

New research shows promise for possible HIV cure

3 December - Researchers have used radioimmunotherapy (RIT) to destroy remaining human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-infected cells in the blood samples of patients treated with antiretroviral therapy, offering the promise of a strategy for curing HIV infection. Results of the study were presented today at the annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA). [Science Daily](#)

Oxytocin found to stimulate social brain regions in children with autism

2 December - ...Now, the first study of how oxytocin affects the brains of children with autism finds hints of promise — and also suggestions of what its limitations might be. On the promising side, the small study, published Monday in The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, found that the hormone, given as an inhalant, generated increased activity in parts of the brain involved in social connection. This suggests not only that oxytocin can stimulate social brain areas, but also that in children with autism these brain regions are not irrevocably damaged but are plastic enough to be influenced. The limitations could include a finding that oxytocin prompted greater brain activity in children with the least severe autism. Some experts said that this could imply that oxytocin may work primarily in less-impaired people, but others said it might simply suggest that different doses are needed. [New York Times](#)

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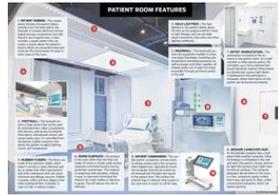
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The hospital room of the future



17 November - ...Doctors and nurses, architects and designers all say the room setting has an important but largely neglected role to play in the delivery of quality care and outcomes. Consider infections. One out of every 20 patients admitted to a hospital picks up an infection while there... Now, the patient room of the future is being designed as a safe, private, comfortable place conducive to healing. "With all the knowledge we've gained," says Douglas Wood, director of the Mayo Clinic Center for Innovation, "we can increasingly create an environment in the hospital to minimize the transmission of bacteria, increase the circulation of air, and reduce pain, discomfort and poor clinical outcomes." [The Wall Street Journal](#)

WHO: Up to 500,000 spinal injuries annually

2 December - The World Health Organization says as many as 500-thousand people suffer spinal cord injuries every year. People with such injuries are much more likely to die prematurely, with the worst survival rates in low and middle income countries... The WHO's Alana Officer says while such injuries can cause paralysis, the problem is much bigger than that. "There are a lot more associated health problems, such as difficulty with bowel and bladder function, difficulty with sexual function, associated problems around mental health conditions. So it's much broader than just experiencing paralysis." [VOA](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

- 29 November - Influenza-like-illness (ILI) and Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) are slowly increasing in NORTHCOM, PACOM, and EUCOM.
- The percent of outpatient encounters due to ILI is above baseline in CENTCOM and EUCOM.
- Among training centers in week 47, influenza rates remain at or below expected values.
- The influenza vaccination coverage for the DoD (active duty component only) is 88%.
[AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 47 (November 17-23, 2013), influenza activity increased slightly in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** Of 4,996 specimens tested and reported by U.S. World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories during week 47, 397 (7.9%) were positive for influenza.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the epidemic threshold.
- **Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths:** No influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.
- **Outpatient Illness Surveillance:** The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 1.7%, below the national baseline of 2.0%. [FluView](#)

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During weeks 46 & 47, 96 specimens were collected and received from 37 locations. Results were finalized for 87 specimens from 35 locations. For specimens collected during Week 46, there was one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09. For specimens collected during Week 47, there were six influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses identified.
- Cumulative results were finalized for 395 specimens from 59 locations. There were 21 specimens positive for influenza (14 A(H1N1)pdm09, four A(H3N2), and three B/unknown lineage). Other respiratory pathogens identified were 11 adenovirus, two *Chlamydomphila pneumonia*, two coronavirus, seven human metapneumovirus, 21 *Mycoplasma pneumonia*, 36 parainfluenza, five RSV, and 106 rhinovirus/enterovirus. To date, 19 non-influenza co-infections have been identified (seven adenovirus & rhinovirus/enterovirus, one *Chlamydomphila pneumoniae* & rhinovirus/enterovirus, one coronavirus & RSV, one human metapneumovirus & rhinovirus/enterovirus, one parainfluenza & RSV, three parainfluenza & rhinovirus/enterovirus, and five RSV & rhinovirus/enterovirus).
- Of 395 ILI cases, 197 are service members (49.9%), 130 are children (32.9%), and 68 are spouses & other beneficiaries (17.2%). There are no unknown beneficiary types. The median age of ILI cases with known age (n=395) is 24 (range 0, 85) and 136 (34.4%) of these specimens are from ILI cases 18 years of age or younger. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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

For week 47/2013:

- All 28 reporting countries recorded low-intensity influenza activity.
- Of 357 sentinel specimens tested across 23 countries, three were positive for influenza A virus.

- Three hospitalised laboratory-confirmed influenza cases were reported by the UK.

Since the start of the 2013–2014 influenza surveillance period in week 40/2013, there has been no evidence of sustained influenza activity in Europe. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

First real-time flu forecast successful

3 December - Scientists were able to reliably predict the timing of the 2012-2013 influenza season up to nine weeks in advance of its peak. The first large-scale demonstration of the flu forecasting system by scientists at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health was carried out in 108 cities across the United States... The flu forecasting system adapts techniques used in modern weather prediction to turn real-time, Web-based estimates of influenza infection into local forecasts of the seasonal peak by locality. [Science Daily](#)

Google.org: Flu Trends

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

Influenza vaccination and risk of hospitalization among adults with laboratory confirmed influenza illness

26 November - Influenza vaccine is moderately effective for preventing influenza illness. It is not known if vaccination reduces the risk of subsequent hospital admission among patients with vaccine failure and laboratory confirmed influenza illness... Influenza was identified in 1393 (28%) of 4996 participants. Sixty-two (6%) of 1020 with influenza A and 17 (5%) of 369 with influenza B were hospitalized. Vaccination was not associated with a reduced risk of hospital admission among all participants with influenza; or among those with influenza A or influenza B. Influenza vaccination was not associated with hospitalization after non-influenza respiratory illness... Influenza vaccination did not reduce the risk of subsequent hospital admission among patients with vaccine failure. These findings do not support the hypothesis that vaccination mitigates influenza illness severity. [Vaccine](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 30 November 2013:

- Influenza: Two cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H1N1) among US military basic trainees.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were at or below expected values. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 16 November 2013 (Week 46), influenza-like illness (ILI) activity continues to increase slightly in both Army and civilian populations, with influenza A-activity steadily increasing nationwide.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 46 were 37% lower than for the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Five hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in week 46. To date, 8 cases have been reported during this influenza season: 2 in AD SMs and 6 in non-AD beneficiaries.
- Viral specimens: During week 46, 108 of 630 (17%) laboratory specimens tested were positive for respiratory pathogens. As in week 45, more specimens were positive for Influenza A (40%) than for RSV (33%). The majority of influenza A-specimens were submitted by MTFs in SRMC.
- Army Vaccination Rates: Army (COMPO 1) compliance in week 46: USAREUR 98%, MEDCOM 95%, TRADOC 86%, USARPAC 86%, FORSCOM 85%, USARSO 63%. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

2009 pandemic flu death toll much higher than official worldwide estimates

27 November - A research team consisting of more than 60 collaborators in 26 countries has estimated the global death toll from the 2009 outbreak of the H1N1 virus to be 10 times higher than the World Health Organization's count, which was based on laboratory-confirmed cases of this flu. The study, which appears online in *PLOS Medicine*, suggests that the pandemic virus caused up to 203,000 respiratory deaths around the world. "This study confirms that the H1N1 virus killed many more people globally than originally believed," says lead author Lone Simonsen, PhD, a research professor in the Department of Global Health at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services. "We also found that the mortality burden of this pandemic fell most heavily on younger people and those living in certain parts of the Americas." [e! Science News](#)

FDA clears first adjuvanted H5N1 vaccine

22 November - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) today approved the first adjuvanted vaccine against H5N1 influenza, a product destined for the US government's pandemic emergency stockpile. It is also the nation's first adjuvanted flu vaccine to gain FDA clearance. The vaccine, made by a Canadian subsidiary of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), is

indicated for use in people age 18 and older who are at increased risk of exposure to H5N1 avian influenza, the FDA said in a statement. [CIDRAP](#)

Hong Kong confirms first human H7N9 bird-flu case

2 December - Hong Kong is on public-health alert after the city confirmed its first human case of the deadly H7N9 bird flu, with an Indonesian domestic worker hospitalized in critical condition. The government said late Monday the 36-year-old woman had visited the Chinese city of Shenzhen last month, and had contact with poultry there. She fell ill on Nov. 21 and was hospitalized six days later. [Wall Street Journal](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

CDC finds holes in restaurant food safety systems

3 December - A set of studies released this week by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its partners points to widespread holes in restaurant food safety systems, such as risky handling of ground beef and chicken and too-warm shipping temperatures for leafy greens... [A] survey of restaurant workers, revealed that 20% of them said they had worked while sick with a gastrointestinal illness within the preceding year. In an accompanying commentary, Craig W. Hedberg, PhD, wrote that... "Because infected food workers were identified as the source for half of foodborne norovirus infection outbreaks in the United States from 2001 through 2008 and may have contributed to transmission in over 80% of these outbreaks, eliminating the motivations of workers to work while ill should be a clear priority." ...In a press release about the studies, the CDC noted that more than half of all foodborne disease outbreaks in the United States are associated with restaurants, delis, banquet facilities, schools, and other institutions. [CIDRAP](#)

Multistate outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 infections linked to ready-to-eat salads

21 November - As of November 19, 2013, a total of 32 persons infected with the outbreak strain of STEC O157:H7 have been reported from four states.

- The number of ill persons identified in each state is as follows: Arizona (1), California (27), Texas (1), and Washington (3).
- 32% of ill persons have been hospitalized. Two ill persons have developed hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), and no deaths have been reported.

The STEC O157:H7 PFGE pattern combination in this outbreak is new to the PulseNet

database.

Epidemiologic and traceback investigations conducted by local, state, and federal officials indicate that consumption of two ready-to-eat salads, Field Fresh Chopped Salad with Grilled Chicken and Mexicali Salad with Chili Lime Chicken, produced by Glass Onion Catering and sold at Trader Joe's grocery store locations, are one likely source of this outbreak of STEC O157:H7 infections. [CDC](#)

New strides in spaying and neutering



2 December - ...The 40-year movement to convince Americans that they should spay or neuter their pets has been nothing short of a triumph: 83 percent of owned dogs and 91 percent of owned cats are now spayed or neutered in the United States, compared with only about 10 percent in the 1970s. But surgically removing the reproductive organs of every pet is still time-consuming for veterinarians, unpopular among a subset of pet owners and ethically troubling to animal welfare advocates. It is also an impractical solution to sterilizing stray animals, which constitute the bulk of America's nuisance animal problem... Now, a handful of nonsurgical sterilization treatments are emerging — led by Zeuterin, which could be commercially available in the United States by the end of this year — that could reduce or even eliminate the need for traditional neutering. [New York Times](#)

Thailand: Fever surveillance in ruminants, 2012

December 2013 - Two cases of fatal endocarditis in Khon Kaen Province in northeastern Thailand were found to be caused by *Coxiella burnetii*. Although *C. burnetii* is known to be present in many countries, including in Thailand, human infection is more commonly associated with sheep and goats... Results [of this study] indicate a high frequency of *C. burnetii* infections in some provinces, which roughly match locations where fatal human cases of endocarditis have occurred. It is common practice among the agrarian population in Thailand to consume ruminant placenta. Although this tissue is reportedly cooked before consumption, the preparation process may result in environmental contamination sufficient to expose persons who were not in close contact with the infected animal. This study demonstrates that sampling and PCR of grossly normal ruminant placenta is a viable stand-alone approach for surveillance of *C. burnetii* that might enable the generation, at a minimal cost, of a highly detailed map showing areas where humans and animals are at risk for Q fever. [Emerging Infectious Diseases](#)

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Caffeine energy drinks 'intensify heart contractions'

2 December - Energy drinks packed with caffeine can change the way the heart beats, researchers warn. The team from the University of Bonn in Germany imaged the hearts of 17 people an hour after they had an energy drink. The study showed contractions were more forceful after the drink... The researchers gave the participants a drink containing 32mg per 100ml of caffeine and 400mg per 100ml of another chemical, taurine. They showed the chamber of the heart that pumps blood around the body, the left ventricle, was contracting harder an hour after the energy drink was taken than at the start of the study. [BBC News](#)

Healthy and overweight myth?

3 December - There's been a great debate about whether you can be fat, and healthy at the same time. In fact, there's a subset of obese people that stay free of metabolic issues like diabetes. But now, a large study looking at data dating all the way back to 1950, tells us being obese, with or without metabolic disease, is a ticket to a shorter life. This study presented three important findings. First, compared with healthy, normal weight people, metabolically healthy obese people were still at higher risk for cardiac and other death. Second, those with metabolic disease were at risk, no matter what their weight. Finally, blood pressure, waist circumference, and insulin resistance increased, and HDL cholesterol, the healthy kind, decreased, as BMI rose. Moving forward, you and your doctor may want to consider your BMI, and whether you have any metabolic conditions as you manage your long term health. [Medline Plus](#)

Morning-after pill might be less effective in overweight women

27 November -The FDA is investigating whether emergency contraception (Plan B One-Step and generics) has reduced efficacy in women over a certain weight, Reuters reports. The agency's review was prompted by European health regulators ordering a label change on a similar product, which was found to lose effectiveness starting at roughly 165 lb., becoming ineffective after 176 lb. Anne Moore, a nurse practitioner with *NEJM Journal Watch*, commented: "According to the CDC, the average American woman weighs 166.2 pounds, which may raise concern about the efficacy of this type of emergency contraception among many U.S. women. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

New insights into the dementia epidemic

27 November - Described in the early 1980s as "The Silent Epidemic," dementia in the elderly will soon become a clarion call for public health experts worldwide... The combined effects of longer lives and the dramatic bulge of baby boomers reaching old age will magnify the epidemic in future decades. Although demographics will drive an increase in the number of dementia cases, recent reports — generally based on population-based

community studies or survey data — point to declining age-specific prevalence or incidence rates among people born later in the first half of the 20th century... Education was protective against cognitive impairment, and the results suggested that “overall, the combined impact of recent trends in medical, lifestyle, demographic, and social factors has been positive for the cognitive health of older Americans. [New England Journal of Medicine](#)

Sleep therapy is expected to gain a wider role in depression treatment

23 November - An insomnia therapy that scientists just reported could double the effectiveness of depression treatment is not widely available nor particularly well understood by psychiatrists or the public. The American Board of Sleep Medicine has certified just 400 practitioners in the United States to administer it, and they are sparse, even in big cities. That may change soon, however. Four rigorous studies of the treatment are nearing completion and due to be reported in coming months. In the past year, the American Psychological Association recognized sleep psychology as a specialty, and the Department of Veterans Affairs began a program to train about 600 sleep specialists. So-called insomnia disorder is defined as at least three months of poor sleep that causes problems at work, at home or in relationships. The need is great: Depression is the most common mood disorder, affecting some 18 million Americans in any given year, and most have insomnia. [New York Times](#)

Why a brisk walk is better

4 December - ...Paul T. Williams, a statistician at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, gathered data about 7,374 male and 31,607 female participants from the walkers’ health study [and] divided participants into four numerically equal categories, based on their normal pace. Those in Category 1, the fleetest, averaged less than 13.5 minutes per mile, putting them on the cusp of jogging, while those in Category 4, the slowest, strolled at a relatively dilatory 17 minutes or more per mile... [Deaths among the walkers] disproportionately were clustered among the slowest walkers. Those in Category 4 were about 18 percent more likely to have died from any cause than those in the other three categories and were particularly vulnerable to deaths from heart disease and dementia... The most encouraging news embedded in the new study is that longevity rises with small improvements in pace. [New York Times](#)

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Angola: Drought contributes to cholera outbreak in southern Angola



5 December - A protracted drought followed by the onset of the rainy season in southern Angola has triggered a sharp increase in cholera cases, mainly concentrated in Cunene province, where over 1,000 infections and 48 deaths were recorded during a two-week period in November, according to figures from the Ministry of Health. [IRIN](#)

Circumcisions to help prevent AIDS are on the rise

2 December - Circumcision for AIDS prevention is increasing rapidly in eastern and southern Africa, according to newly released figures. Unaid, the United Nations agency fighting the disease, said about 3.2 million African men had been voluntarily circumcised since word began spreading in 2007 of studies showing that it lowered the risk of infection by about 60 percent. The goal is to circumcise more than 20 million by 2015. [New York Times](#)

Ethiopia: Cell phones boost access to contraceptives

4 December - A project offering increased health services in portions of the largely rural countryside of this country proposes to lower the birth rate by increasing access to birth control with an electronic voucher scheme targeting young Ethiopian women between the ages of 15 and 29 years of age. The scheme is based on teams of health volunteers who offer rural women the chance to learn the benefits of birth control and have an opportunity to order intra-uterine devices (IUDs) and other birth control measures. [VOA](#)

Sudan: Yellow fever, WHO update

3 December - The Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) in Sudan has notified WHO of a yellow fever (YF) outbreak affecting twelve localities in West and South Kordofan states. The affected localities are Lagawa, Kailak, Muglad and Abyei localities in West Kordofan and Elreef Alshargi, Abu Gibaiha, Ghadir, Habila, Kadugli, Altadamon, Talodi and Aliri in South Kordofan. Between 3 October and 24 November 2013, a total of 44 suspected cases of yellow fever including 14 deaths (CFR: 31.8%) were reported from this outbreak. [WHO](#)

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Afghanistan: Stoning for adulterers may become legal again



25 November - Death by stoning for convicted adulterers is being written into Afghan law, a senior official said on Monday, the latest sign that human rights won at great cost since the Taliban were ousted in 2001 are rolling back as foreign troops withdraw. "We are working on the draft of a sharia penal code where the punishment for adultery, if there are four eyewitnesses, is stoning," said Rohullah Qarizada, who is part of the sharia Islamic law committee working on the draft and head of the Afghan Independent Bar Association. Billions have been invested on promoting human rights in Afghanistan over more than 12 years of war and donors fear that hard won progress, particularly for women, may be eroding. Human Rights Watch reports that they saw a draft provision of the law which states that if a court finds that a couple engaged in sexual intercourse outside of legal marriage, both the man and the woman would be sentenced to "stoning to death if the adulterer or adulteress is married." And if the "adulterer or adulteress is unmarried" the sentence shall be "whipping 100 lashes." [NBC News](#)

Syria: As polio spreads, politics thwarts vaccination efforts



2 December - The World Health Organization has declared a polio emergency in Syria. After being free of the crippling disease for more than a decade, Syria recorded 10 confirmed cases of polio in October. Now the outbreak has grown to 17 confirmed cases, the WHO said last week. And the virus has spread to four cities, including a war-torn suburb near the capital of Damascus. The Syrian government has pledged to immunize all Syrian children under age 5. But wartime politics is getting in the way. And the outbreak is expected to grow. "Actually, it is spreading quickly," says Dr. Mohammed Al Saad in Gaziantep, Turkey, near the northern border of Syria. There are now more than 60 suspected cases, he says, with new ones reported each day. Most cases have occurred in children less than 2 years old, who were born in Syria after the war started and missed their routine vaccinations, he says. [NPR](#)

Qatar: Qatar finds camels infected with MERS-CoV

2 December - ...Qatari officials revealed that the [MERS-CoV] virus was found in three camels with links to two human case-patients... The report from Qatar marks the second time the virus has been found in camels, the previous instance having been reported by

Saudi Arabia about 3 weeks ago. But scientists have not yet found conclusive evidence that camels are a source of human infections... The WHO said the three infected camels were among a herd of 14 that were tested in the investigation of the human cases. All the camels seemed healthy or showed only mild signs of illness when samples were collected for MERS-CoV testing, and their status didn't change during their ensuing 40 days in isolation, the agency said. [CIDRAP](#)

United Arab Emirates: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) – WHO update

2 December - On 1 December 2013 WHO was informed of an additional three laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in the United Arab Emirates... Additionally, two previously laboratory-confirmed cases from Qatar died on 15 and 21 November 2013. Globally, from September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a total of 163 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including 71 deaths. [WHO](#)

USEUCOM

European Union: Surveillance of HIV suggests that younger men who have sex with men are at higher risk of infection, 2003 to 2012

28 November - In 2012, newly reported human immunodeficiency virus diagnoses in the European Union /European Economic Area remained stable at around 30,000 cases. Since 2003, cases in men who have sex with men (MSM) aged 20 to 29 years-old doubled, while the proportion of late presenters in this group remained stable. Persistent declines occurred among older MSM age groups, particularly that between 30 and 39 years-old. Interventions targeting younger MSM are needed to prevent a resurgence of the epidemic in Europe.

[Eurosveillance](#)

United Kingdom: Britain should scrap plan to ban khat drug

28 November - Britain's plan to ban khat, a leafy plant chewed as a stimulant in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula, should be dropped because it could alienate immigrants and damage counter-terrorism operations, lawmakers said on Friday. Parliament's Home Affairs Committee, a panel with influence but no legal power, said the ban was not based on any evidence of medical or social harm... Banning the use of khat, or qat, would create tension between the police and immigrants, particularly Somalis who have settled across Britain, the committee said in a report. [Reuters](#)

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Canada: Military health system questioned after soldiers' deaths

4 December - Questions are being asked about the Canadian military's capacity to help soldiers and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, after four soldiers died from apparent suicides in a time span of less than two weeks. All four soldiers had served in Afghanistan. It is not known if all of them suffered from PTSD... Military ombudsman Pierre Daigle told CBC News Network that a key hurdle to delivering care is a lack of adequate resources. Daigle said that in 2002, the military identified a need for 147 health-care providers. He said that number was never met. [CBC](#)

Canada: Syphilis outbreak rages on in Nunavut

5 December - A syphilis outbreak in Nunavut that began last year continues to concern health officials. Nunavut health officials say there have been 74 confirmed cases of the sexually-transmitted infection in Nunavut since May 2012 with new cases every week. Most are in Iqaluit. [CBC](#)

U.S.: As hospital prices soar, a stitch tops \$500

2 December - ...In a medical system notorious for opaque finances and inflated bills, nothing is more convoluted than hospital pricing, economists say. Hospital charges represent about a third of the \$2.7 trillion annual United States health care bill, the biggest single segment, according to government statistics, and are the largest driver of medical inflation, a new study in The Journal of the American Medical Association found. A day spent as an inpatient at an American hospital costs on average more than \$4,000, five times the charge in many other developed countries, according to the International Federation of Health Plans, a global network of health insurance industries. The most expensive hospitals charge more than \$12,500 a day. And at many of them, including California Pacific Medical Center, emergency rooms are profit centers. That is why one of the simplest and oldest medical procedures — closing a wound with a needle and thread — typically leads to bills of at least \$1,500 and often much more. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: Ex-hospital worker gets 39 years for causing hepatitis C outbreak

2 December - A New Hampshire hospital worker was sentenced to 39 years in prison Monday for causing a multistate outbreak of hepatitis C last year, according to a news release from the U.S. attorney's office in New Hampshire. David Kwiatkowski pleaded guilty to seven counts of tampering with a consumer product and seven counts of obtaining controlled substances by fraud in New Hampshire's U.S. District Court, according to a plea agreement filed in August. Thirty people were diagnosed with the virus that attacks the liver

and can be fatal... Investigators said Kwiatkowski stole syringes of the painkiller fentanyl from patients who were scheduled for surgery. "Kwiatkowski used the stolen syringes to inject himself, causing them to become tainted with his infected blood, before filling them with saline and then replacing them for use in the medical procedure," the U.S. attorney's office in Concord, New Hampshire, said in a statement. [CNN](#)

U.S.: FDA starts regulating compounding pharmacies

2 December - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Monday began the process of regulating compounding pharmacies, which create new drug combinations or alter drugs to suit individual patient needs. Under the Drug Quality and Security Act, signed into law Nov. 27 by President Barack Obama, these pharmacies are being encouraged to register with the FDA. The agency will then classify them as outsourcing pharmacies, enabling them to sell bulk drugs to hospitals and other health-care facilities. The law was prompted by the deaths last year of 64 people who received fungus-contaminated steroid medications that were given in injections to treat back and joint pain. An additional 750 people in 20 states were sickened by the contaminated drug. [US News and World Report](#)

U.S.: Genetic test maker 23andMe stops marketing after FDA warning

2 December - Home genetic test maker 23andMe, which is backed by Google Inc, stopped marketing its products last week after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warned that it did not have regulatory approval to do so, a company spokeswoman said. The company stopped television, radio and online advertising for its \$99 DNA test which is supposed to detect a range of genetic variants and provide information about a person's health risks, the spokeswoman said. The FDA said last week it had sent a warning letter to the company on November 22 stating that products designed to diagnose, mitigate or prevent disease were medical devices that required regulatory clearance. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Meningitis outbreak - fourth case reported in UC Santa Barbara

4 December - The school administration of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) is on high alert after the confirmation of the fourth case of meningococcal disease on one of their students... Two of the infected students were able to recover and return to school. UCSB spokesperson George Foulsham said that they are expecting the fourth to recuperate as well. UCSB authorities and county health officers have reacted promptly. Around 500 to 700 students who are close contacts of the four patients were provided antibiotics to prevent them from developing the disease. Other students who were possibly exposed to the bacteria were also asked to take preventive medication. [Headlines & Global News](#)

U.S.: Phoenix flight passengers told to get precautionary tuberculosis test

2 December - Dozens of passengers on a weekend US Airways Express flight have been told to get tuberculosis tests and possible vaccinations after a passenger in a face mask was taken off of the plane in Phoenix. The Maricopa County Department of Public Health was still conducting tests to determine if the passenger was ill, a spokesperson told the Los Angeles Times on Monday. But passengers told reporters over the weekend they were asked to check with their doctors about precautions relating to tuberculosis exposure... US Airways told reporters that the passenger had been cleared to fly when he boarded in Austin, but his status was changed to "no-fly" while the plane was in the air. "The warning that came from the CDC did not occur until after the flight had departed so the passenger did not have a red flag in their reservation system or any warning there" [Los Angeles Times](#)

U.S.: Pregnancy rates continue to fall

5 December - Pregnancy rates continue to decline in the United States, a federal report released Thursday shows. The rate reached a 12-year low in 2009, when there were about 102 pregnancies for every 1,000 women aged 15 to 44, according to the latest statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That rate is 12 percent below the 1990 rate of about 116 pregnancies per 1,000 women. Only the 1997 rate of 102 has been lower during the past 30 years, according to the report. Experts said two factors are driving the downward trend: improved access to birth control and decisions by women to put off childbearing until later in life. [WebMD](#)

U.S.: Twenty-year summary of surveillance for human hantavirus infections

December 2013 - In the past 20 years of surveillance for hantavirus in humans in the United States, 624 cases of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) have been reported, 96% of which occurred in states west of the Mississippi River. Most hantavirus infections are caused by Sin Nombre virus, but cases of HPS caused by Bayou, Black Creek Canal, Monongahela, and New York viruses have been reported, and cases of domestically acquired hemorrhagic fever and renal syndrome caused by Seoul virus have also occurred. Rarely, hantavirus infections result in mild illness that does not progress to HPS. [Emerging Infectious Diseases](#)

U.S.: Vaccines prevented 103 million-plus cases of disease in U.S. since 1924, study finds

3 December - Vaccines have prevented more than 103 million cases of communicable childhood diseases in the United States since 1924, including at least 26 million in the last decade alone, according to a study published last week in the New England Journal of

Medicine. The epidemiologists from the University of Pittsburgh who conducted the study say that they hope these statistics will help inform the public about the value of childhood vaccination programs — and the need to continue them. [MinnPost](#)

U.S.: Winnable Battles Progress Report

21 November - We know the leading causes of injury, illness, disability, and death for Americans. Many of these result in needless suffering because, in fact, we have the knowledge and tools that could make a difference. The Winnable Battles... aren't CDC's only health priorities, but they are areas where dedicated focus can quickly achieve good results. CDC's Winnable Battles programs are evidence-based, cost-effective ways to tackle these health challenges... We've made progress in most areas, but still have more to do to meet our 2015 goals. [CDC](#)

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Australia: Health warning as measles cases triple

6 December - Health authorities are warning South Australians to make sure their children's immunisation is up to date with new figures showing the number of measles cases has tripled in the state in the past 12 months. Medicare Local Country South Australian board member and general practitioner Grant Baker said there had been 16 outbreaks this year compared to six last year. The number includes three new cases reported in the past month. [Newcastle Herald](#)

Japan: HIV, blood donation risk

1 December - Blood from a donor infected with HIV [human immunodeficiency virus], the virus that causes AIDS, was transfused into 2 patients, as the donated blood slipped through checks by the Japanese Red Cross Society, it was learned Tuesday [26 Nov 2013]. The Japanese Red Cross Society and the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry have identified the recipients of the blood transfusions and are checking whether they were infected with the virus. The ministry's Pharmaceutical Affairs and Food Sanitation Council will discuss steps to be taken at a panel on blood product operations. It is the 1st time that blood from a donor infected with HIV was found to have been transfused to patients [in Japan] since the Japanese Red Cross Society reinforced its checking systems in 2004, after a case of HIV infection through blood transfusion was found the previous year. [ProMED-mail](#)

Philippines: Task force for Philippine typhoon relief effort shut down

2 December - The U.S. Pacific Command has shut down the task force it set up two weeks ago to assist in relief efforts following Typhoon Haiyan, the storm that killed thousands in the Philippines. Joint Task Force 505 ended its mission Sunday "now that the unique capabilities of the U.S. military are no longer required," its headquarters at Camp Aguinaldo in Manila said in a statement. A small contingent is still in the Philippines to oversee the pullout of the task force's remaining elements. As of last week, about 1,100 U.S. troops were on the ground and about 1,900 were on ships in support of Operation Damayan. At their peak, the relief efforts involved more than 13,400 U.S. military personnel, 66 aircraft and 12 naval vessels. American troops ran airfields, purified water, distributed aid and evacuated more than 21,000 people after one of the most powerful storms to ever make landfall battered the country's midsection Nov. 8. [Stars and Stripes](#)

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USSOUTHCOM

Colombia: FARC peace may cut cocaine, but synthetic drugs new scourge

27 November - A peace deal between FARC rebels and the Colombian government would greatly help cut cocaine production in Colombia, but officials fear new crime gangs could fill the gap while anti-narcotics police fight a new scourge: synthetic drugs... Notorious drug cartels have been dismantled, and a U.S.-backed military offensive against the drug-funded FARC, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and other insurgent groups has helped cut shipments of cocaine overseas. But while a gram of cocaine is considerably cheaper on the streets of Bogota than an ecstasy tablet or hit of crystal meth, synthetic drugs are easier to produce and traffic than a kilo of cocaine, attracting a new type of drug producer and dealer. [Reuters](#)

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