

9 January 2015

Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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This two-minute video explains the key points from the [Cytisine versus Nicotine for Smoking Cessation](#) article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.



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Vaccines: A masterpiece in the making

Vaccines are one of the greatest advances in human history. They have saved millions of lives, and led to better health and opportunity for children and families everywhere.

The stories behind this success and the future promise of immunization must be told.

The Art of Saving a Life is a collection of these stories, as told by more than 30 world-renowned photographers, painters, sculptors, writers, filmmakers, and musicians.



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U.S. MILITARY

Army touts 'brain thermometer' as front-line tool

3 January - Army medics will soon use what's been dubbed a "brain thermometer": a mobile phone application that can, within minutes, provide health professionals data to help diagnose and measure a soldier's injuries. ... The Defense Automated Neurobehavioral Assessment, produced by AnthroTronix, includes five-, 20- and 45-minute batteries of both neurocognitive tests and psychological survey questions. DANA will not only help a health professional diagnose traumatic brain injury, but also provide valuable information that can help isolate depression, post-traumatic stress, and other neurocognitive issues. [Army Times](#)

Development and implementation of a cohort review for latent tuberculosis infection

December 2014 - ... The U.S. Army's [tuberculosis (TB)] control program can be improved by reducing unnecessary testing of low-risk groups, increasing completion of [latent TB infection (LTBI)] treatment, reducing treatment delays, and ensuring data accuracy. The LTBI cohort review should be performed at least annually at the installation level to improve the quality of TB control programs. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Fort Detrick mishaps risked exposing workers to dangerous microbes

5 January - Two laboratory accidents at the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) within the past 16 months may have exposed nine workers to a bacterium and a virus regarded as potential bioweapons, according to a report yesterday in *The Frederick (Md.) News-Post*. In one incident, six people were potentially exposed to *Burkholderia mallei*, which causes glanders, when a plastic tube in a boiling-water bath popped open on Sep 19, 2013, according to the story. It is based on reports obtained from USAMRIID and other government labs at Fort Detrick, Md., through requests filed under the Freedom of Information Act. ... In the other incident, a USAMRIID microbiologist was working with TC-83, a virus derived from Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus (VEEV), on May 23, 2014, when tubes of the virus broke and released the contents

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.

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while spinning inside a centrifuge. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

Iraq veteran, now a West Point professor, seeks to rein in disability pay



7 January – ... [Lt. Col. Daniel Gade] said that too many veterans become financially dependent on those monthly checks, choose not to find jobs and lose the sense of identity and self-worth that can come from work. "People who stay home because they are getting paid enough to get by on disability are worse off," he said. "They are more likely to

abuse drugs and alcohol. They are more likely to live alone. You've seen these guys. And the system is driving you to become one of them, if you are not careful." ... [He is] pushing the idea that the Department of Veterans Affairs should move away from paying veterans for their wounds and instead create incentives for them to find work or create businesses. [New York Times](#)

Major study of bereaved military Families underway

4 January - ... By the hundreds, other widows, widowers, parents, siblings and children are sharing accounts of their grief as part of the largest study ever of America's military families as they go through bereavement. About 2,000 people have participated over the past three years, and one-on-one interviews will continue through February. The federally funded project is being conducted by the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at the Maryland-based Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. The study is open to families of the more than 19,000 service members from all branches of the military who have died on active duty since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, regardless of whether the death resulted from combat, accident, illness, suicide or other causes. ... "Our interest is understanding what these families need," [Dr. Stephen Cozza] said. "Recognizing the need will allow us to make better policy recommendations as to what sort of services would be appropriate for them." [ABC News](#)

New hours for Fort Carson soldiers with winter fully upon us

5 January - ... For the balance of the winter, Fort Carson is going on banker's hours. "It's a cultural change," said Sgt. Maj. Michael Borrelli, one of the leaders who came up with the new schedule. Soldiers can saunter to the post at 8 a.m. and will practice their craft until 3:30 p.m., when they'll do afternoon physical training. What happens next is nearly unmilitary. "At 1730 (5:30 p.m.) we salute the flag for retreat and go home," Borrelli said. ... Sound military reasons buttress the change. ... Doing heavy workouts before dawn in the winter can lead to frostbite or worse, said Lt. Col. Rob Price, the post surgeon. Injuries to muscles, ligaments and tendons increase in winter because cold limbs perform poorly and snow and ice lead to more trips, slips and falls, he said. ... "Research has shown that both

strength and endurance is higher later in the day," Price said. "Your body performs better later in the day." [The Gazette](#)

Rape cases to be handled differently

7 January - Among the changes to military personnel policy included in the fiscal 2015 defense policy law signed Dec. 22 are provisions to change the way the Pentagon handles sexual assault and rape cases. ... The new law requires that commanding officers' fitness reports specify whether the commander has established a unit climate amenable to reporting sexual assault allegations; gives victims a say in whether the crime should be prosecuted in civilian or military court; throws out the "good soldier" defense, a tactic that allowed defendants to cite their military character to demonstrate the likelihood of innocence; and provides victims with special counsel. The law also allows victims to petition the court if they disagree with the outcome of a case; specifies which medical personnel should conduct forensic sexual assault exams; lets victims who were dismissed from the military and were victims of sexual violence to appeal their discharges to their services' Board for Correction of Military Records; and establishes a Defense Advisory Committee on Investigation, Prosecution and Defense of Sexual Assault. [Military Times](#)

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GLOBAL

From a pile of dirt, hope for a powerful new antibiotic

7 January - An unusual method for producing antibiotics may help solve an urgent global problem: the rise in infections that resist treatment with commonly used drugs, and the lack of new antibiotics to replace ones that no longer work. The method, which extracts drugs from bacteria that live in dirt, has yielded a powerful new antibiotic, researchers reported in the journal *Nature* on Wednesday. The new drug, teixobactin, was tested in mice and easily cured severe infections, with no side effects. Better still, the researchers said, the drug works in a way that makes it very unlikely that bacteria will become resistant to it. And the method developed to produce the drug has the potential to unlock a trove of natural compounds to fight infections and cancer — molecules that were previously beyond scientists' reach because the microbes that produce them could not be grown in the laboratory. [New York Times](#)

New virus linked to Kansas man's death identified

5 January - A previously unknown virus linked to the death of a Kansas farmer in 2014 has been identified, according to the state's health department. The so-called Bourbon virus — named after the patient's county of residence — is a type of thogotovirus that's believed to be transmitted by ticks or mosquitoes, the *New York Times* reports. The previously healthy

patient — who had frequent tick bites — was admitted with fever, muscle aches, and loss of appetite; blood tests identified high liver enzyme levels and low white blood cell counts. He quickly developed lung and kidney failure and shock, and died within 10 days of presentation. Rocky Mountain spotted fever, ehrlichiosis, and Heartland virus were all ruled out. Eventually, Bourbon virus was identified. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Strict rest after concussion adds no benefit over usual care

6 January - Strict rest following concussion doesn't appear to help pediatric patients any better than usual care, according to a randomized trial in Pediatrics. Nearly 100 patients aged 11 to 22 years presenting to the emergency department with acute concussion were randomized to either usual care (1 to 2 days of rest, followed by gradual resumption of activity) or strict rest (5 days of rest, with gradual activity resumption). At 10 days' follow-up, patients in the strict rest group actually reported more concussive symptoms than those receiving usual care. The groups did not differ in most neurocognitive and balance outcomes. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Surface-plasmon-based biosensor enables point-of-care detection of dengue-fever virus

2 January - Researchers at the University of Ottawa (UO; Ottawa, ON, Canada) and the University of Malaya (UM; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) have collaborated to develop a plasmonic biosensor for rapid diagnosis of the dengue virus, which affects a half billion people each year. The sensor can lead to inexpensive, point-of-care detection of dengue fever. The new technology uses surface plasmons on gold films to create a microfluidic biosensor able to detect dengue antibodies. [LaserFocusWorld](#)

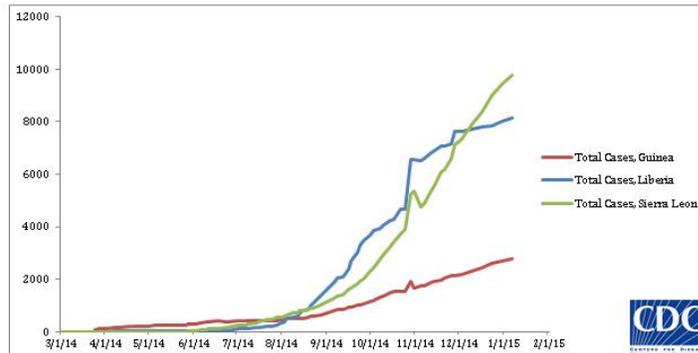
EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa - Case counts

8 January - Countries with Widespread Transmission. [CDC](#)

Country	Total Cases	Laboratory-Confirmed Cases	Total Deaths
Guinea	2776	2477	1786
Liberia	8166	3118	3496
Sierra Leone	10030	7759	2977
Total	20972	13354	8259

2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa - Cumulative reported cases graphs



Cumulative reported cases in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone provided in [WHO situation reports](#) beginning on March 25, 2014 through the most recent situation report on January 7, 2015. [CDC](#)

Clinical presentation of patients with Ebola virus disease in Conakry, Guinea

1 January - ... From March 25 to April 26, 2014, we performed a study of all patients with laboratory-confirmed [Ebola virus disease (EVD)] in Conakry. Mortality was the primary outcome. Secondary outcomes included patient characteristics, complications, treatments, and comparisons between survivors and nonsurvivors. Of 80 patients who presented with symptoms, 37 had laboratory-confirmed EVD. Among confirmed cases, the median age was 38 years (interquartile range, 28 to 46), 24 patients (65%) were men, and 14 (38%) were health care workers; among the health care workers, nosocomial transmission was implicated in 12 patients (32%). Patients with confirmed EVD presented to the hospital a median of 5 days (interquartile range, 3 to 7) after the onset of symptoms, most commonly with fever (in 84% of the patients; mean temperature, 38.6°C), fatigue (in 65%), diarrhea (in 62%), and tachycardia (mean heart rate, >93 beats per minute). Of these patients, 28 (76%) were treated with intravenous fluids and 37 (100%) with antibiotics. Sixteen patients (43%) died, with a median time from symptom onset to death of 8 days (interquartile range, 7 to 11). Patients who were 40 years of age or older, as compared with those under the age of 40 years, had a relative risk of death of 3.49 (95% confidence interval, 1.42 to 8.59; $P=0.007$). [New England Journal of Medicine](#)

Ebola drug trial under way in Liberia

6 January - A clinical drug trial is now under way at a major health centre in Liberia's capital to determine if a medication already used to treat other viruses could help those suffering from Ebola. The drug called brincidofovir is being tested in patients at the ELWA 3 centre operated by Doctors Without Borders, the group said. ... "It must be stressed that it is not a miracle cure and it is still not known whether it will help patients survive the virus," the

medical charity said in announcing the start of the drug trial this week. ... Also on Tuesday, US pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson said that it has started human trials on a possible vaccine against the virus. The Phase I testing is being carried out by the Oxford Vaccine Group at Britain's Oxford University. The tests, involving 72 healthy volunteers, will examine how their bodies tolerate the potential vaccine. [Al Jazeera](#)

Ebola kills nearly 500 health care workers

7 January - ... The new numbers on health care workers show that doctors, nurses and other people working at Ebola treatment centers are among those at highest risk. "A total of 838 health-care workers are known to have been infected with Ebola virus disease up to the end of 4 January 2015, 495 of whom have died," WHO said in a statement. [NBC News](#)

Ebola outbreak: Mali travel notice removed

7 January - The travel notice entitled [Ebola in Mali](#) has been removed from the CDC Travelers' Health site. Additionally, travelers from Mali will no longer be required to undergo enhanced screening and monitoring when entering the United States. However, anyone traveling from Mali who arrived in the United States before January 6, 2015 must continue active monitoring and report any symptoms for 21 days after leaving Mali. ... Warning Level 3 travel notices remain in effect for Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone advising travelers to avoid nonessential travel to these countries. [CDC](#)

Ebola outbreak will end in 2015 - UN's Anthony Banbury

2 January - Anthony Banbury said the number of Ebola cases would be brought down to zero by the close of this year, but admitted that the end was "not close". "We are engaged in an epic battle," he said. ... Mr Banbury admitted his three month mission had failed to hit its target of 100% safe burials and treatment of 70% of infected people. But he praised international efforts and insisted "the global response to the Ebola crisis has been extremely successful". "Going forward it's going to be extremely hard for us to bring it down to zero [cases], but that is what we will do," he told reporters, adding: "I believe we will end Ebola in 2015." [BBC News](#)

EbolaTracks: An automated SMS system for monitoring persons potentially exposed to Ebola virus disease

8 January - ... The EbolaTracks software was developed using the database programme FileMaker and runs on the Microsoft Windows 7 operating system. The SMS functionality utilises an SMS gateway to send and receive messages via mobile telephone networks. Persons under surveillance are requested to take their temperature twice daily between the hours of 8 and 9AM and again between 5 and 6PM. EbolaTracks participants are contacted twice daily by SMS, at 9AM and 6PM respectively. At each of those times, the system sends two consecutive SMSs. The first SMS asks if the participant is feeling unwell and requests a 'Y' (for yes) or 'N' (for no) response by SMS. ... Following the first SMS and response, a second SMS asks the participant to report their temperature, recorded in degree Celsius. ...

For any participants who report feeling unwell or a temperature $\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$, EbolaTracks automatically sends both an SMS and an email alert to an on-call medical officer, who then telephones the individual to assess their condition and determine appropriate management. [Eurosurveillance](#)

Signs that Ebola 'may be leveling off' in Sierra Leone: WHO

7 January - Sierra Leone, the country worst affected by Ebola, reported nearly 250 new confirmed cases in the past week but the spread of the virus there may be slowing, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday. ... "There are signs that case incidence may have leveled off in Sierra Leone, although with 248 new confirmed cases reported in the week to 4 January 2015, it remains by far the worst-affected country at present," the WHO said. Cases are still under-reported and unevenly spread in West Africa. The virus is spreading most rapidly in western Sierra Leone, where the capital Freetown reported 93 of the new confirmed cases, the WHO said. [Reuters](#)

The Pentagon's mission against Ebola is quietly shrinking

5 January - ... Hundreds of U.S. service members have returned to the United States in recent days after serving as part of Joint Forces Command-United Assistance, the military unit that has built Ebola treatment units, shipped supplies over remote areas and provided a logistical framework to speed up the treatment of those infected. ... Three months later, none of the estimated 3,000 troops who have deployed have contracted the virus, and the mission is slowly winding down. Lt. Col. Rob Gordon, the deputy operations officer with the 101st Airborne Division, said in an interview with The Leaf-Chronicle of Kentucky on Saturday that he and some of the other soldiers expected to be gone for six months, but returned early because contracting help from the Liberians allowed them to complete their work more quickly than thought. " ... The U.S. military completed the last of 17 Ebola treatment units it planned to build last month. The Defense Department also was training some health care workers to staff the treatment units, but that mission shifted back in its entirety to the World Health Organization on Jan. 1, officials said. [Washington Post](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 52:

- In NORTHCOM, influenza activity continued to increase and A/H3N2 continues to be the predominantly circulating strain. The CDC reports that 6.8% of all deaths reported

through the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System were due to P&I. This is at the epidemic threshold of 6.8% for week 51.

- In EUCOM, influenza activity is low and influenza A/H3N2 and A/H1N1 are mainly circulating.
- In PACOM, influenza activity remained stable among service members. ILI and P&I activity increased slightly and is at baseline.
- In CENTCOM and AFRICOM, there was a sharp increase in ILI and P&I activity.
- Among local nationals in SOUTHCOM, influenza activity was minimal. [AFHSC DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 52 (December 21-27, 2014), influenza activity continued to increase in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** Of 24,001 specimens tested and reported by U.S. World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories during week 52, 7,289 (30.4%) 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:** Six influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.
- **Outpatient Illness Surveillance:** The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 5.9%, above the national baseline of 2.0%. All 10 regions reported ILI at or above region-specific baseline levels.
- **Geographic Spread of Influenza:** The geographic spread of influenza in 43 states was reported as widespread. [FluView](#)

DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During Surveillance Weeks 51 & 52, 14 December - 27 December 2014, a total of 428 specimens were collected and received from 49 locations. Results were finalized for 202 specimens from 39 locations. During Week 51, the laboratory identified 156 influenza A(H3N2), two A/not subtyped and seven influenza B. During Week 52, seven influenza A(H3N2) were identified. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

FAO notes mutations in H5N1 samples from Egypt's poultry

7 January - Amid a flurry of human H5N1 influenza cases in Egypt, scientists have found H5N1 viruses in Egyptian poultry that have two mutations that are usually associated with adaptation to mammals, a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) official reported today. Juan Lubroth, DVM, PhD, the FAO's chief veterinary officer, told CIDRAP

News that the mutations were identified through genetic sequencing of 52 recent isolates from poultry. But he also said a recent analysis of viruses from two human patients in Egypt showed no major genetic changes. [CIDRAP](#)

FDA clears wider use of rapid test for influenza

6 January - As the United States grapples with a flu season that has killed 21 people so far, the Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday cleared the way for greater use of a molecular test designed to quickly detect the presence of the virus in a nasal swab. The test, made by Alere Inc, can now be used in a wide variety of clinical settings, including doctors' offices, emergency rooms, clinics and other healthcare facilities. Previously, it could only be used in a limited number of laboratories. [Reuters](#)

Flu News Europe

Week 52/2014:

- In week 52/2014, the intensity of influenza activity remained low in the majority of countries in Europe but the number of countries with increased activity continued to rise compared to previous weeks.
- The level of influenza activity increased in three of the 29 reporting countries, while the proportion of influenza virus-positive sentinel specimens increased to 13%, up from 9% in the previous week.
- The predominant influenza virus was type A, with A(H3N2) viruses predominating in primary care, among laboratory-confirmed hospitalized cases as well as other sources.

Season:

- The influenza season in Europe appears to be starting: the proportion of influenza virus-positive sentinel specimens has increased to over 10%, despite the majority of countries still reporting low intensities of influenza activity.
- Influenza A(H3N2) viruses have been the predominant viruses detected across all surveillance systems. While there have been difficulties in characterizing A(H3N2) viruses antigenically, as in the United States of America, the majority of the A(H3N2) viruses characterized genetically have fallen in genetic subgroups containing viruses that have drifted antigenically compared to the virus recommended for use in the 2014–2015 northern hemisphere influenza vaccine.
- The circulating influenza A(H3N2), A(H1N1)pdm09 and B viruses remain susceptible to the antivirals oseltamivir and zanamivir currently licensed in Europe.
- No indication of increased mortality has been reported in the European project for monitoring excess mortality for public health action. [Flu News Europe](#)

Human infection with avian influenza A(H5N6) virus – China

28 December - On 23 December 2014, the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) of China notified WHO of 1 laboratory-confirmed case of human infection with avian influenza A(H5N6) virus. Details of the case are as follows: A 58-year-old

male from Guangzhou city, Guangdong Province who developed symptoms on 4 December. He was admitted to hospital on 9 December and is now in critical condition. The patient has history of exposure to live poultry. [WHO](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 3 January 2015:

- Influenza
 - Thirteen cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees.
 - Increased influenza A/H3 activity at 3 recruit sites. High proportion of cases were vaccinated.
 - A/H3 also increasing among DoD dependents and civilians near US-Mexico border. Very few cases had been vaccinated prior to illness.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated elevated FRI rates at MCRD San Diego. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 13 December 2014 (Week 50)

- Overall influenza activity continues to increase in both Army and civilian populations. The southeast region of the U.S. continues to see higher influenza activity than other regions, as is the midwest.
- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 50 were 10% higher than for the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Two hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in week 50. To date, 3 cases have been reported during this influenza season: 1 AD SM and 2 non-vaccinated non-AD beneficiaries.
- Viral specimens: During week 50, 627 of 1807 (35%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens; 527 of 1616 (32.6%) specimens tested for influenza A were positive. SRMC reported the most influenza A-positive specimens (77%), followed by NRM (11%), WRMC (11%), ERM (1%), and PRM (0.4%). [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

WHO Influenza Update

23 December 2014 - Globally influenza activity continued to increase in the northern hemisphere with influenza A(H3N2) viruses predominating so far. The antigenic characterization of most recent A(H3N2) viruses so far indicated differences from the A(H3N2) virus used in the influenza vaccines for the northern hemisphere 2014-2015.

- In North America, the levels of influenza activity continued to increase and had passed the seasonal thresholds. Influenza A(H3N2) virus predominated.
- In Europe overall influenza activity mainly associated with A(H3N2) virus continued to increase, but remained at low levels.
- In eastern Asia, influenza activity continued to increase with influenza A(H3N2) virus predominating.
- In northern Africa influenza activity increased with influenza B virus predominating, except for Egypt where influenza activity was low.
- In eastern and western Africa influenza activity was low or decreasing, except for the United Republic of Tanzania where increased detections of influenza A(H3N2) were reported.
- In tropical countries of the Americas, influenza activity was low with the exception of Costa Rica and Cuba where an increase of influenza detections was reported.
- In tropical Asia, influenza activity was low.
- In the southern hemisphere, influenza activity was at inter-seasonal level. [WHO](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Lab analysis finds variety of contaminants in popular pet food brands

7 January - Laboratory testing found levels of harmful bacteria and mycotoxins in 11 of 12 cat and dog food brand samples, according to a Jan 5 study from the Association for Truth in Pet Food (ATPF). Several labs contracted by INTI Service Corporation found pathogenic microorganisms, bacteria associated with spoiled or putrid meat, and "qualifying pathogens" considered by the Food and Drug Administration to pose a serious threat to human health, the ATPF said in a press release. Bacteria found included *Staphylococcus* (10 brands), *Acinetobacter* (8), *Bacillus* (10), *Pseudomonas* (9), *Lactobacillus* (8), *Streptococcus* (7), *Halomonas* (8), and evidence of proteo- and cyanobacteria (9). ... Testing also identified that 4 of the 8 brands tested for fungal toxins showed medium to high levels, with 2 brands (Meow Mix Tender Centers and Beneful Original dog kibble) considered as high risk for mycotoxins that can cause liver and kidney disease in pets. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

McDonald's Japan apologizes after tooth, plastic found in food

7 January - McDonald's Japan (2702.T) has apologized to customers and vowed to ensure product safety after objects including a tooth and plastic were found in its food, the latest trouble for a fast-food chain hit by sliding sales and a shortage of french fries. The chain,

49.9 percent-owned by McDonald's Corp (MCD.N), has been grappling with falling sales that began long before a food safety scandal last summer hit confidence in its products. ... Wednesday's apology came after a diner found a roughly 4 cm (1 1/2 inch) strip of vinyl in a Chicken McNugget at the weekend. That prompted the chain to halt sales of nuggets made on the same day as the contaminated item at a plant in Thailand. [Reuters](#)

Tetrodotoxin poisoning outbreak from imported dried puffer fish — Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014

2 January - On June 13, 2014, two patients went to the Hennepin County Medical Center Emergency Department in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with symptoms suggestive of tetrodotoxin poisoning (i.e., oral paresthesias, weakness, and dyspnea) after consuming dried puffer fish (also known as globefish) purchased during a recent visit to New York City. ... The Minnesota Department of Health conducted an investigation to determine the source of the product and samples were sent to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition for chemical and genetic analysis. Genetic analysis identified the product as puffer fish (*Lagocephalus lunaris*) and chemical analysis determined it was contaminated with high levels of tetrodotoxin. A traceback investigation was unable to determine the original source of the product. ... Because these fish were reportedly purchased in the United States, they pose a substantial U.S. public health hazard given the potency of the toxin and the high levels of toxin found in the fish. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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WELLNESS

DASH diet named best overall diet

7 January - The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet has earned the top spot in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2015 Best Diet rankings, earning 4.1 out of 5 stars for best overall diet. To do well in this category, a regimen "had to be relatively easy to follow, nutritious, safe, effective for weight loss and protective against diabetes and heart disease." Close runners-up include the TLC Diet, the Mayo Clinic Diet, Weight Watchers, and the Mediterranean Diet. Coming in 34th (and last) place is the Paleo Diet. Diets were also ranked in seven sub-categories. Weight Watchers earned the top slot for Best Weight-Loss Diet, the Biggest Loser Diet and DASH tied for first for Best Diabetes Diet, and the Ornish Diet won for Best Heart-Healthy Diet. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Extra antioxidants may make little difference in lifespan

7 January - People who get a lot of antioxidants in their diets, or who take them in supplement form, don't live any longer than those who just eat well overall, according to a

long term study of retirees in California. ... "There is good scientific evidence that eating a diet with lots of vegetables and fruits is healthful and lowers risks of certain diseases," said lead author Annlia Paganini-Hill of the Clinic for Aging Research and Education at the University of California, Irvine. "However, it is unclear whether this is because of the antioxidants, something else in these foods, other foods in people's diet, or other lifestyle choices," Paganini-Hill told Reuters Health by email. Most double-blind randomized clinical trials - the gold standard of medical evidence - have found that antioxidant supplements do not prevent disease, she said. [Reuters](#)

'Fat but fit' only temporary

6 January - The concept of "healthy" obesity doesn't pan out over time, a longitudinal study showed. Among obese adults without multiple metabolic risk factors at baseline in the Whitehall II cohort study of British government workers, 31.8% had developed those risks after 5 years, Joshua A. Bell, MSc, of University College London, and colleagues reported. That percentage rose to 40.9% by 10 years and 51.5% after 20 years, the researchers reported in the Jan. 6/13 issue of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. People who started out obese but healthy were eight times more likely than their nonobese counterparts to fall in that unhealthy obese category after 2 decades. [MedPage Today](#)

New York City's public health 'warrior' revamps HIV messaging



4 January - Beneath Grand Central Station, the doors of a downtown 6 train open to reveal one of the New York City Department of Health's newest public service announcements: A simple poster with two young men embracing tenderly urges riders to take an HIV test. When this train lurches away from the platform and another takes its place minutes later, a second ad makes an appearance. It's part of the same campaign and features a different person: Carmen Carrera, a television personality and transgender woman. A third iteration of the ad, scattered across other subway trains, features a heterosexual couple. The accompanying text on all three versions is stern yet not alarmist, reading, "Be HIV sure: One night can change your HIV status." ... [The] execution of this campaign is novel, a departure from the city's past anti-HIV efforts. Previously, ominous and dramatic messaging reigned, akin to lurid anti-smoking campaigns. A 2010 New York City Department of Health video illustrated in macabre detail HIV's ability to cause osteoporosis, dementia and anal cancer. [Al Jazeera](#)

PTSD doubles diabetes risk in women

7 January - Women with post-traumatic stress disorder are nearly twice as likely to develop type 2 diabetes compared with women who don't have PTSD, according to researchers. ... The longitudinal cohort study provides the strongest evidence to date of a causal relationship between PTSD and type 2 diabetes. ... The researchers analyzed survey data

collected between 1989 and 2011 from 49,739 women enrolled in the Nurses' Health Study II and found a dose-response relationship: the greater the number and severity of PTSD symptoms, the greater a woman's risk of type 2 diabetes. Four percent of the nurses reported the highest number of PTSD symptoms. By age 60, nearly 12 percent of women with the highest number of PTSD symptoms had developed type 2 diabetes, whereas fewer than 7 percent of women with no trauma exposure had diabetes. Antidepressant use and elevated body mass index accounted for nearly half of the increased risk of type 2 diabetes, or 34 and 14 percent, respectively. [Harvard School of Public Health](#)

Specialists split over HPV test's role in cancer screening

8 January - Two medical groups say doctors could replace the Pap smear with a different test to screen many women for cervical cancer. But that recommendation, included in an "interim guidance" released Thursday, is highly controversial; other experts call it premature. ... [The] human papilloma virus is now thought to cause most cases of cervical cancer; last spring the Food and Drug Administration approved a test for the HPV virus as a primary screening test for the malignancy. ... [An expert] committee concludes that doctors could consider the HPV test a primary screening test for women beginning at age 25. "Pap smears are probably missing a fair amount of cancer and precancer in women," says Warner Huh of the University of Alabama, who chaired the committee. "The HPV test really outperforms Pap smears when it comes to cancer detection as well as precancerous detection." ... [But in] many cases, an infection with the virus is just temporary; it quickly disappears without causing any problems. If lots of women start getting tested for HPV, Zuckerman says, many women will end up getting expensive, painful and possibly harmful follow-up tests they never really needed. ... Another worry is that HPV isn't the cause of all cases of cervical cancer. If you substitute the HPV test for a Pap smear, she says, "You could definitely miss out on some women who will in fact develop cervical cancer." [NPR](#)

To treat depression, drugs or therapy?



8 January - ... Dr. Helen Mayberg, a professor of psychiatry at Emory University, recently published a study in JAMA Psychiatry that identified a potential biomarker in the brain that could predict whether a depressed patient would respond better to psychotherapy or antidepressant medication. Using PET scans, she randomized a group of depressed patients to either 12 weeks of treatment with the S.S.R.I. antidepressant Lexapro or to cognitive behavior therapy, which teaches patients to correct their negative and distorted thinking. Over all, about 40 percent of the depressed subjects responded to either treatment. But Dr. Mayberg found striking brain differences between patients who did well with Lexapro compared with cognitive behavior therapy, and vice versa. Patients who had low activity in a brain region called the anterior insula measured before treatment responded quite well to C.B.T. but poorly to Lexapro; conversely, those with high activity in

this region had an excellent response to Lexapro, but did poorly with C.B.T. [New York Times](#)

Vitamin B may counter negative effects of pesticide on fertility

5 January - Women who have adequate levels of B vitamins in their bodies are more likely to get and stay pregnant even when they also have high levels of a common pesticide known to have detrimental reproductive effects. ... The findings ... suggest that B vitamins may have a protective effect that counteracts the levels of DDT in their bodies. DDT, a known endocrine disruptor, is still used to kill mosquitoes in many countries where malaria remains a serious public health concern. The United States banned the pesticide in 1972; China, where the study was conducted, followed suit in 1984. DDT, however, can remain in the body and environment for decades. [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#)

Year born may determine obesity risk

29 December - Investigators working to unravel the impact of genetics versus environment on traits such as obesity may also need to consider a new factor: when individuals were born. In the current issue of PNAS Early Edition a multi-institutional research team reports finding that the impact of a variant in the FTO gene that previous research has linked to obesity risk largely depends on birth year, with no correlation between gene variant and obesity in study participants born in earlier years and a far stronger correlation than previously reported for those born in later years. ... While there was no correlation between the obesity-risk variant and BMI for those born before 1942, in participants born after 1942 the correlation was twice as strong as reported in previous studies. While this study was not able to identify the environmental differences that combine with FTO variant to increase the risk of obesity, the authors note that post-World War II factors such as increased reliance on technology rather than physical labor and the availability of high-calorie processed foods are likely contributors. [Harvard Gazette](#)

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USAFRICOM

Ghana: Inside a massive electronics graveyard



29 December - ... Up to 80 percent of all the electronic devices and appliances thrown away around the world may end up in dumps like Agbogbloshie. Some research suggests that the average American, for example, produces about 66 pounds of electronic junk every year. This is hazardous waste—the cathode ray tube in just one old style

computer monitor can contain almost seven pounds of lead—which makes it expensive to recycle. So hundreds of tons of this waste quietly disappear into a world of legitimate recycling companies, shady middlemen, and black market trash traders. Interpol says one of every three shipping containers inspected leaving Europe for the developing world is packed with illegal electronic waste. Much of that ends up in urban mines like Agbogbloshe, and is processed by a workforce of young men with few tools, no safety equipment, and no training, then fed back into the global economy. [Atlantic](#)

Nigeria: Shell to pay \$83.5m for Nigeria oil spill



7 January - Oil giant Royal Dutch Shell has agreed to pay a Nigerian fishing community about \$83.5m for the worst oil spill ever suffered in the African nation's southern delta region. Wednesday's agreement ends a three-year legal battle in Britain over two spills in 2008 that destroyed thousands of hectares of mangroves and the fish and

shellfish that sustained villagers of the Bodo community. It "is thought to be one of the largest payouts to an entire community following environmental damage," the claimants' London lawyers, Leigh Day, said. The Anglo-Dutch energy giant said it was paying \$53.1 million to 15,600 fishermen and farmers and \$30.4 million to their Bodo community. [Al Jazeera](#)

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USCENTCOM

Afghanistan: Afghan health care at risk as international aid is scaled back



5 January - ... In key areas, health care in Afghanistan has undeniably improved since the Taliban regime was toppled 13 years ago. But some highly touted gains may have been overstated, and others are at risk as international militaries pull out of the country and aid organizations scale back their efforts. Improvements in health care are one of the main

success stories the international military coalition and aid groups like the U.S. Agency for International Development point to in Afghanistan. Maternal mortality has been reduced by 80 percent and child mortality by 60 percent, according to USAID; life expectancy has risen, and more rural Afghans have access to health care, though the extent of that improvement is debated. The Afghan Public Health Ministry estimates that there are now 2,286 health facilities across Afghanistan, compared with about 500 in 2002, and 60 percent of Afghans

are within one hour of a health clinic. But some watchdogs have criticized such numbers as misleading, as facilities vary widely in quality and some cited by both U.S. and Afghan officials may not even be in operation. [Stars and Stripes](#)

Afghanistan: Heroin addiction spreads with alarming speed across Afghanistan

7 January - ... Afghan farmers have grown opium poppies for generations, but the vast majority was exported and relatively few Afghans consumed it. In 2000, the Taliban regime deemed poppy growing un-Islamic and banned the practice. By 2005, though, the Taliban had returned as a predatory militia, hampering eradication and crop substitution programs sponsored by the United States. Production roared back, and domestic heroin use grew with it. "People used to assume that we cultivated poppy but only for export. Today ... at least 5 percent of the drugs produced in Afghanistan are consumed here, and they are imported from the neighbors as well," said Mohammed Ibrahim Azhar, the deputy minister of counter narcotics. [Washington Post](#)

Jordan: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

5 January - On 25 December 2014, the National IHR Focal Point of Jordan notified WHO of 1 additional case of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection. ... Globally, the WHO has been notified of 945 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including at least 348 related deaths. [WHO](#)

Pakistan: Measles epidemic in Balochistan

4 January - Balochistan's health department failed to carry out its anti-measles campaign in the last month of 2014, belying repeated claims by the health minister that the launch of an emergency campaign was imminent. ... Meanwhile, the epidemic continues to wrack the province, with major outbreaks in Zhob, Qila Abdullah, Lasbela, Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Pishin, Kalat, Ziarat, and Chagai. So far in this latest epidemic, more than 1,350 children have been affected. In the absence of a well-coordinated vaccination programme, more than four million children remain at risk of contracting measles in Balochistan. [The Express Tribune](#)

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

5 January - Between 19 and 30 December 2014, the National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) notified WHO of 3 additional cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection, including 1 death. [WHO](#)

Syria: Medical aid unable to enter Syrian rebel-held Aleppo

8 January - The World Health Organization (WHO) has been unable to get a desperately needed medical aid convoy through to civilians in the rebel-held part of Aleppo despite a

government promise last month to give it access. "Delays often happen due to operational and/or security reasons but details are not to be shared," WHO spokesman Tarik Jašarević said in an email on Tuesday. ... The non-governmental Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organisations, made up of Syrian doctors, says cholera, typhoid, scabies and tuberculosis are spreading among the 360,000 people in rebel-held Aleppo for lack of treatments or vaccines. The area is cut off on three sides by the Syrian army. [Reuters](#)

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USEUCOM

England: Public Health England warn parents about feeding their children sugar

5 January - Parents are being encouraged to cut back on the amount of sugar they feed their children in a new Public Health England (PHE) campaign launched today. ... The Change4Life campaign will offer parents "sugar swap" tips including swapping ice cream for yoghurt and sugary drinks for sugar-free drinks. Health guidelines advise that 10% of a person's daily energy or calorie intake should be made up of sugar, but the Department of Health fear children aged four to 10 years old could be consuming far more. Children aged 4-10 get 17% of their daily sugar from soft drinks; 17% from biscuits, buns, cakes, pastries and fruit pies, 14% from confectionery, 13% from fruit juice, and 8% from breakfast cereals.

[Western Daily Press](#)

Russia: Vodka prices: Putin calls for cap amid economic crisis

24 December - Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered his government to curb rising vodka prices. Mr Putin, who has been hit by increasing economic woes, said that high prices encouraged the consumption of illegal and possibly unsafe alcohol. ... Mr Putin, who promotes a healthy lifestyle, asked "relevant agencies" to think about what he said, adding that the government should fight against the illegal trafficking of alcohol. According to a leading university study last year, 25% of Russian men die before reaching their mid-50s, Reuters reports. Alcohol was found to be a contributing factor in some of these early deaths. [BBC News](#)

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Mexico: Six women murdered each day as femicide in Mexico nears a pandemic

4 January - ... [Local] United Nations officials say [Mexico] ranks among the world's 20 worst countries for violence against women. Newspapers routinely report "crimes of passion" or unidentified female body parts floating in sewage canals. Misogyny and corruption prevent most cases from seeing justice. According to the National Citizen Femicide Observatory, a coalition of 43 groups that document the crime, six women are assassinated every day. Yet only 24 percent of the 3,892 femicides the group identified in 2012 and 2013 were investigated by authorities. And only 1.6 percent led to sentencing. ... The word "feminicidio" first entered the vernacular in the 1990s, with explosive rates of disappearances and murders of women in the border town of Ciudad Juárez. In fact, more women have been killed in the state of Mexico, which surrounds the capital city of the same name. The number doubled from 2005 to 2011, when the current national president, Enrique Peña Nieto, was governor of the state. [Al Jazeera](#)

U.S.: 9 measles cases linked to Disney theme parks in California

7 January - Seven Californians and two people in Utah have confirmed cases of measles likely contracted on trips last month to Disney theme parks in California, state officials said Wednesday. Three more California residents are suspected of having measles. All patients with confirmed or suspected cases of the illness visited Disneyland or Disney California Adventure between Dec. 15 and Dec. 20, according to the state's Department of Public Health. They likely got the airborne illness at one of the parks then, officials said, adding people with measles can be infectious for nine days. The seven Californians with confirmed cases are from five different areas of the state and range from 8 months to 21 years old. Six were not vaccinated against the disease, including two who were too young to be vaccinated. [Chicago Tribune](#)

U.S.: Alcohol poisoning kills 6 Americans a day, federal report finds

6 January - Six Americans die from alcohol poisoning daily on average, and mortality rates are highest among middle-aged men, federal health authorities reported on Tuesday. The report is the first in a decade by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to tally alcohol poisonings for the entire American population. Most previous analyses looked at certain groups, in particular young people. The agency found that an average of 2,221 people died of alcohol poisoning annually between 2010 and 2012. Three-quarters of the deaths occurred among 35- to 64-year-olds, the report found, and about three-quarters were men. The death rate was highest among men aged 45 to 54. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: Assessment of emergency responders after a vinyl chloride release from a train derailment — New Jersey, 2012

9 January - On November 30, 2012, at approximately 7:00 am, a freight train derailed near a small town in New Jersey. Four tank cars, including a breached tank car carrying vinyl chloride, landed in a tidal creek. ... Acute exposure [to vinyl chloride] can cause respiratory irritation and headache, drowsiness, and dizziness; chronic occupational exposure can result in liver damage, accumulation of fat in the liver, and tumors. . A survey of 93 emergency responders found that 26% of respondents experienced headache and upper respiratory symptoms during the response. A minority (22%) reported using respiratory protection during the incident. Twenty-one (23%) of 92 respondents sought medical evaluation. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S. court upholds NY state vaccination requirement for students

7 January - New York state's requirement that children be vaccinated in order to attend public school does not violate parents' religious rights under the U.S. Constitution, a federal appeals court said Wednesday. A three-judge panel of the 2nd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Manhattan also ruled that students who receive religious exemptions from the vaccination law may be kept out of school during disease outbreaks, affirming a lower court decision. The 2nd Circuit rejected claims by three New York City parents who said the individual right to religious liberty granted by the First Amendment trumped the state's goal of preventing the spread of diseases in schools. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Public health adversely affected when federal officials overlooked inhalation risk during West Virginia chemical spill

5 January- West Virginians suffered adverse health effects inside their homes after following plumbing-system flushing directions in response to a chemical spill last January, and these recommendations failed to consider the dangers of chemical vapor exposure, according to a new study. Chemical storage tanks operated by Freedom Industries Inc. leaked more than 10,000 gallons of an industrial solvent into West Virginia's Elk River on Jan. 9, 2014. More than 300,000 people near the state capital Charleston were directed not to use the licorice-smelling tap water except for flushing toilets due to its unknown health impacts. ... Based on the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) health-based drinking water screening level, water company officials recommended that residents flush contaminated water from their plumbing systems. Contaminated drinking water was discharged into storm drains, septic tanks and the sanitary sewer system. ... The public health consequences associated with flushing contaminated water into poorly ventilated rooms such as bathrooms were overlooked, and people became ill because of it." [Purdue University](#)

U.S.: Roche says U.S. regulators approve blood test for three viruses

9 January - Swiss drugmaker Roche said on Friday U.S. regulators had approved its blood test for detecting the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and the Hepatitis B and C Viruses (HBV, HCV) in donated blood products. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: Texas abortion clinic rules tested in appeals court

7 January - Lawyers for abortion clinics squared off with Texas state attorneys in a federal appeals court here on Wednesday, arguing over the constitutionality of stringent abortion clinic rules that would force more than half the remaining abortion providers in Texas to close. But more is at stake than whether large portions of South and West Texas will be left with no abortion clinics, forcing some women to drive hundreds of miles for an abortion, for safety reasons that doctors and clinic owners call a pretense. The case argued here — along with others arising from the hundreds of abortion restrictions adopted by more than half of the states in recent years — poses issues that are likely to end up before the Supreme Court in the next year or two, many legal experts say, with the potential for significant effects on the ability of women to obtain abortions in much of the country. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: Three more measles cases reported in South Dakota

5 January - Three more South Dakota residents have been diagnosed with measles, increasing the number of cases to nine. State Epidemiologist Dr. Lon Kightlinger says all cases have been reported in Davison County. The cases involve five adults and four children and their ages range from 19 months old to 41 years old. None of the individuals had previously been vaccinated against the virus. Kightlinger says officials have confirmed the individuals weren't vaccinated due to personal choice and not because of a religious or medical reason. ... These are the first measles cases in the state since 1997. [Rapid City Journal](#)

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USPACOM

Australia: Measles alert follows RMIT graduation ceremony

5 January - Thousands of people may have been exposed to measles at a packed graduation ceremony at Melbourne's Etihad stadium three weeks ago. Victoria's chief health officer, Rosemary Lester, has urged doctors to look out for signs of the potentially fatal virus after three cases were linked to an RMIT graduation ceremony at Etihad Stadium on

December 17, which attracted about 33,000 people. Two of the three people diagnosed with the highly contagious disease were aged 11 and 17 and both were unvaccinated. It is unclear if the third person, a 35-year-old man, was immunised against the disease. Dr Lester said two of the three were now in hospital. [Sydney Morning Herald](#)

Australia: Racing to contain Australia's wildfires

5 January – [In Adelaide] firefighters are in a race against time to bring raging wildfires under control before temperatures begin to rise over the next 48 hours. ... Fires that threatened townships in Victoria state have been brought under control since they first started on Friday night, but a blaze in South Australia state continues to burn uncontrolled. The area affected is home to a number of national parks and communities. ... So far about 12,500 hectares of scrubland have been affected with 29 people injured since Friday, mostly firefighters tackling the blaze. [Al Jazeera](#)

China to allow online sales of prescription drugs as early as this month: sources

9 January - China will allow online sales of prescription drugs as early as this month, a policy that will open up an over 1 trillion yuan (\$161 billion) market to online pharmacy operators like Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. The China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA) is finalising which prescription medicines to approve for sale, a senior healthcare policy adviser told Reuters. The policy would help reform a fragmented and opaque market controlled by state-run distributors and hospitals, brought into the spotlight last year by a bribery case which saw drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline PLC fined nearly \$500 million. ... Hospitals currently account for around 70 percent of drugs sold to consumers. Among retailers, online pharmacies are restricted to selling over-the-counter medicines and healthcare products such as cough remedies and vitamin tablets. [Reuters](#)

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USSOUTHCOM

Chikungunya cases jump by 25,000; Colombia hit hard

30 December 2014 - Total suspected and confirmed cases of chikungunya in the Caribbean and the Americas increased by 25,639 over the past 10 days, with most of the new cases in Colombia, according to an update yesterday from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The overall total for suspected and confirmed cases stands at 1,097,003 as of Dec 29. Colombia saw the largest increase, with 21,365 new cases, for a total of 74,566. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

Costa Rica dengue cases decreased 78% in 2014

5 January - The Costa Rica Ministry of Health is asking the public to continue to increase their preventive measures in 2015 to thwart dengue and the Chikungunya virus which are both spread by mosquitoes. ... According to the latest official data from December 6, 2014 (week 49 of the year) 10,460 dengue cases were counted, representing a decrease of 78.7% compared to the 49,161 registered that week in 2013. ... As for the Chikungunya virus, the latest data from the Ministry of Health indicates that at least 40 people were affected by this virus in 2014. [The Costa Rica News](#)

Cuba's contributions to local and global public health

6 January - ... Cuba is a perfect example of what a small country from the Global South can do through public health initiatives. On par with the United States, Cuba's life expectancy rate is 78 years. Public health is socialized, which generally increases Cubans' access to health care, but disparities as found in most of the world still exist. For example, pharmacies in more affluent neighborhoods tend to stock a greater range and number of pharmaceuticals than those in those in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. ... Cuba's physician-patient ratio is one of the highest in the world, and Cuba also draws people from Latin America, Africa, and Europe to visit for routine surgery, medical interventions and cosmetic enhancements. ... Similarly, medical professionals have created a number of pharmaceutical advancements as a result of the Cuban government's significant investments in Research and Development. Consequently, Cuba produces vaccines and serums for a variety of ailments. [Huffington Post](#)

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