

9 March 2012

Army Public Health Weekly Update

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U.S. Army Public Health Command



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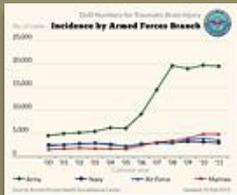
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DoD Special Report on TBI

Traumatic brain injury is one of the invisible wounds of war, and one of the signature injuries of troops wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq. This American Forces Press Service special report highlights the Defense Department's efforts to care for wounded warriors suffering from this condition while promoting research to improve diagnosis and treatment.



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- [Cuba to test new AIDS vaccine on humans](#)

U.S. MILITARY

Health care experiences prior to suicide and self-inflicted injury, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2001-2010

February 2012 - Suicide is a leading cause of deaths of U.S. service members. Medical care providers may play a role in suicide prevention. We summarized the outpatient experiences of service members prior to suicide or self-inflicted injury and compared them with service members without suicidal behavior. During 2001-2010, 45 percent of individuals who completed suicide and 75 percent of those who injured themselves had outpatient encounters within 30 days prior to suicide/self-harm. Primary care was the most frequently visited clinical service prior to suicide/self-harm. As compared to their counterparts, service members with suicidal behavior had especially excessive outpatient visit rates within, but not prior to, 60 days of their deaths/injuries. The finding suggests that there may be one or more “triggering” events that lead to care-seeking. These results may help identify individuals that should be screened for suicide risk. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Many vets with PTSD prescribed opioid painkillers

6 March - Veterans of the Iraq and [Afghanistan](#) wars who are treated for pain are more likely to get very strong painkillers if they also have mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a new study. That's worrisome, researchers said, because some people who take opioids -- which include OxyContin and Vicodin -- abuse the drugs or overdose on them, and those who already have mental troubles may be most at risk. "There's really been a culture of, 'Let's get rid of pain,' and I think unfortunately that pendulum may have swung too far," said Dr. Karen Seal, from the University of California, San Francisco and the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the study's lead author. "What we need to do now is really individually assess patients and talk to patients about what we know of the risks of opiates, especially in those with mental health problems," she told Reuters Health. [Reuters](#)

Navy to give Breathalyzers to sailors, Marines as they report for duty aboard fleet

6 March - The U.S. Navy will start giving Breathalyzer tests to Marines and sailors reporting for duty aboard ships and submarines and at squadrons, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus announced Monday in a worldwide call to forces. The testing is part of a new 21st Century Sailor and Marine initiative -- a multi-prong program aimed at reinforcing healthy lifestyles both on and off-duty. The program emphasizes healthy lifestyles through nutrition, responsible alcohol consumption, zero tolerance for drug use and fitness programs as well

Soldier Medical Readiness Series

The Soldier Medical Readiness Campaign Injury Prevention/Human Performance Optimization Education Series consists of quarterly Defense Connection Online (DCO) sessions. Each DCO session will include presentations from experts in the fields of injury prevention, human performance optimization, and health promotion. Each presentation will be 30-60 minutes long.

Date of the course:
22 March, 1300-1600 EST

Topics:

Soldier Fueling Initiative

Physical Activity and Injury

Physical Readiness Training

Vanguard Fitness Trainer

[More information](#)

Gates Foundation Infographics

The Gates Foundation has a collection of infographics available to illustrate various public health topics.



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.

as suicide prevention, family and personal preparedness and financial planning... The Navy is also beginning random testing of urine samples for chemical compounds like Spice, which is a synthetic marijuana, and will have a contractor conduct in-house testing until the Navy Drug Screening Lab is equipped to handle the new workload. This comes after the lab last month announced that it would undertake more prescription drug testing to look for commonly abused prescription drugs... The Navy is also aiming to become a 100 percent voluntarily smoke-free force by offering tools to quit and ending discounts for cigarettes in Navy and Marine Corps exchanges so prices rise to off-base sales. [Fox News](#)

Soldiers sized up: Army survey for uniforms, armor

6 March - The president may be talking about downsizing the military, but the size of the average soldier is growing. At the Camp Shelby training base near Hattiesburg, Miss., measuring sticks and high-tech body scans are being used on 1,000 servicemen and women. Early findings show soldiers are larger and heavier than when the last survey was taken in 1988, an increase in keeping with that found in the general population, said project leader Cynthia Blackwell. It will take about two years to analyze all the data. Measurements of more than 12,000 service personnel at posts across the U.S. will be used to develop size standards for uniforms and other equipment and to help determine how much to stock in each size. Men and women are measured in separate groups. All wear running shorts and tank tops brought by the measurement contractor to ensure consistency. Officials realized a new survey was needed after more large-sized uniforms than expected were needed for troops deploying to Iraq, Blackwell said. [Yahoo! News](#)

Suicide, mental illness climb in military



7 March - Just one ambulatory visit for a mental health disorder may warn that a soldier is at risk for suicide, researchers said. Those who sought such help were about four times more likely to commit suicide than those who had not made any mental health visits (RR 3.9, 95% CI 3.0 to 4.9), Michelle Canham-

Chervak, PhD, of the Injury Prevention Program of the U.S. Army Public Health Command, and colleagues reported online in Injury Prevention. Patients who were hospitalized with mental illness had more than a 15-fold higher risk of suicide than those not hospitalized (RR 15.5, 95% CI 11.2 to 21.5). "Soldiers seeking treatment for mental disorders and substance abuse should be a focus for suicide prevention," they wrote. [MedPage Today](#)

Wal-Mart therapy tried as Pentagon copes with traumatized troops

8 March - ...About 20 percent of the 2.4 million U.S. troops who served in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 may meet criteria for PTSD from the chaos of wars marked by intense combat with no clear enemy lines, according to congressional researchers and the Rand Corp. Big-box retailers, movie theaters and restaurants are "often busy and noisy, and some people may be hidden behind things -- and all those are perceived as dangerous" by warriors who dodged roadside bombs and watched buddies die in Iraq or Afghanistan, Alan

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Peterson, director of a Pentagon-funded project at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, said in an interview. Doctors in the program sometimes recommend that soldiers confront their fears by visiting a Wal-Mart Stores Inc. (WMT) location and staying until anxieties "fade away on their own," Peterson said in an interview... The benefits of 10 such therapeutic sessions within either two or eight weeks are being studied, and the early results suggest the treatments are so effective that some active-duty military personnel have been able to return to war zones, Peterson said. About 360 military personnel are getting the exposure therapy, he said... A second treatment called cognitive processing therapy is being tested with an additional 400 warriors. [Bloomberg](#)

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GLOBAL

BPA exposure may raise risk of heart disease

5 March - Exposure to bisphenol A (BPA), a controversial chemical commonly used to make plastics, increases a person's risk of developing heart disease later in life, a new study suggests. People primarily are exposed to BPA through packaged foods and drinks, but also may be exposed through drinking water, dental sealants and inhaling household dust. Over a 10-year period, researchers compared BPA levels in 758 people who were initially healthy but later developed heart disease to levels in 861 people who did not develop the disease. These subjects were part of a long-term population study led by the University of Cambridge, in the U.K. The study found that the subjects who developed heart disease had higher levels of the chemical in their urine at the start of the study than those who did not develop the disease. The researchers, from the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry, the University of Exeter and the European Centre for the Environment and Human Health, noted the findings are limited because only one urine sample from each participant was available at the beginning of the 10-year period. Although the study, published online Feb. 21 in the journal *Circulation*, shows an association between BPA and increased heart disease risk, it doesn't prove a cause-and-effect relationship, the researchers pointed out. [Medline Plus](#)

Eyes could provide windows to traumatic brain injury

1 March - Long hailed as windows to the soul, the eyes also might provide insight for researchers at the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, or USARIEM, who are evaluating and working to improve methods for detecting traumatic brain injuries, or TBI, in Soldiers while they are still deployed... The EYE-Tracking Rapid Attention Computation, or EYE-TRAC, device being developed by Sync Think, Inc., of Boston, could provide a new tool in that quest. The portable device, which includes hooded goggles worn by the patient and a hand-held peripheral that displays results, tracks eye movements with two high-speed cameras as the patient follows a moving target on a screen. "It's a relatively simple test, but the device uses complex algorithms to quantify how well a subject can

follow, and synchronize with, the target," said Kevin Coppersmith, Sync Think CEO. "We're measuring attention performance, a subject's focus. We believe eye-movement control provides a window to the brain and can be a reliable indicator of brain health." [Army.mil](#)

Malaria stunts foetal growth



6 March - Malaria infection during the earliest months of pregnancy stunts foetal growth even when the mothers do not have any malarial symptoms, according to a [large-scale study](#) conducted along the Thai-Burmese border. "Malaria needs to be taken into account from the beginning of the pregnancy and not only in the last months before the birth," François Nosten, director of the Mae Sot-based [Shoklo Malaria Research Unit \(SMRU\)](#), which tracked 3,779 women's pregnancies from 2001-2010, told IRIN. [IRIN](#)

U.N. says 2 billion more get safe water to drink

6 March - More than 2 billion people have gained access to better drinking water sources, such as piped supplies and protected wells, between 1990 and 2010, U.N. officials said on Tuesday. The figure means the world has met the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to halve the proportion of people with no safe drinking water well ahead of a 2015 deadline, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) said. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said this was "a great achievement for the people of the world" and noted it was one of the first MDGs to be met. The Millennium Development Goals are a group of targets set by the international community in 2000 to seek to improve health and reduce poverty among the world's poorest people by 2015. "The successful efforts to provide greater access to drinking water are a testament to all who see the MDGs not as a dream, but as a vital tool for improving the lives of millions," Ban said in a statement. [Reuters](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

8 March:

- Influenza-like illness (ILI) incidence rates have increased since week 5 but remained relatively stable within the MHS and influenza activity ranges from low to moderate levels across overseas DoD laboratory surveillance networks.
- The influenza vaccination rate for the DoD (Active Duty component only) is 96%.

[AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 8 (19-25 February 2012), influenza activity in the United States increased slightly, but remained relatively low. [FluView](#)

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

During week 8 (20-26 February 2012), medium or high intensity was reported by 17 countries; 13 countries reported increasing trends. Bulgaria and Italy have reported decreasing trends for three weeks in a row and thus are the first two countries that have peaked in Europe this season. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 3 March 2012:

An increase in influenza cases among southern California DoD dependents and civilians near the US-Mexico border was identified in February 2012.

Adenovirus

- Vaccination against types 4 and 7 adenovirus was instituted at all basic training centers by mid-November 2011 (week 45).
- The proportion of FRI cases positive for adenovirus has markedly decreased since vaccine was reintroduced.
- Type 14 adenovirus is present at MCRD Parris Island.

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](#)

New vaccines could kill the flu

28 February - An emerging class of flu vaccines could for the first time prevent the wide-scale spread of influenza by shutting down the virus' ability to spread and mutate. Princeton University-based researchers said yesterday that the new "cross-protective" or "universal" vaccines, being developed in labs worldwide and some are already in clinical trials, would make a bout with influenza less severe, making it more difficult for the virus to spread, Science Daily reported. At the same time, the vaccines would hinder the virus' ability to evolve and evade immunity by targeting its relatively unchanging characteristics, according to HealthCanal.com, which adds that current flu vaccines "target the pathogen's most adaptable components". Reporting in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the researchers used a computational model to show how cross-protective vaccines could even improve the effectiveness of current vaccines, designed to only fight specific flu strains. Futurity.org quoted lead author Nimalan Arinaminpathy as saying that controlling the flu, currently more like "chasing a moving target", could switch focus from reactionary efforts to population-wide prevention. [The Sydney Morning Herald](#)

Overrepresentation of influenza A(H1N1)PDM09 virus among severe influenza cases in the 2011/12 season in four European countries

1 March - In France, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom, the influenza season 2011/12 started in the final weeks of 2011 and has been dominated by influenza A(H3) viruses with minimal circulation of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and B viruses. A relatively greater proportion, however, of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses were reported in hospitalised laboratory-confirmed influenza cases in four countries. Compared to the season 2010/11, the proportion of subtype A(H3) among hospitalised cases has increased, associated with a larger proportion of cases in the youngest and oldest age groups. [Eurosurveillance](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

3 March - Influenza activity continues increasing but overall activity remains lower than last year. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Bangladesh: Avian influenza situation, WHO

2 March - The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh has confirmed the fourth case of human infection with H5N1 avian influenza in the country. The case is a 40 year-old male from Dhaka City, who was identified as part of the live bird market surveillance system on 26 February 2012. The case presented with cough and currently has recovered. The case was confirmed by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B). An epidemiological investigation and monitoring of the situation is currently being conducted jointly by IEDCR and ICDDR,B. The first case of human infection with H5N1 was reported in the country in 2008, and two cases were reported in 2011. [WHO](#)

Vietnam: Avian influenza situation update, WHO

5 March - The Ministry of Health has reported a confirmed case of human infection with avian influenza A (H5N1) virus. The case is a 22 year-old male from Thanh Hoa province who lived and worked in Binh Duong province. He developed symptoms on 17 February 2012 and first sought medical care on 21 February 2012. He was admitted to the intensive care unit of the Hospital for Tropical Diseases on 23 February 2012 and received Oseltamivir upon admission. He is currently still in hospital. Confirmatory test results for influenza A (H5N1) were obtained on 25 February 2012 by the Pasteur Institute Ho Chi Minh City, a WHO National influenza Centre. Epidemiological investigation indicates that the man was involved in the slaughter and consumption of ducks. Pasteur Institute in Ho Chi Minh City

and the local health sector are conducting the investigation and response. Close contacts of the case with fever have received prophylaxis and are being monitored; all have been confirmed as negative for H5N1 by PCR. To date, of the 122 confirmed cases in Viet Nam, 61 have been fatal. [WHO](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Bolivia: Rabies

6 March - The department [state equivalent] governor's office, through its Departmental Health Services (El Servicio Departamental de Salud; SEDES), reported that cases of canine rabies are occurring in district 9, Tierras Nuevas area (Comarapa neighborhood) and Las Americas (El Trigal neighborhood). Joaquin Monasterio, director of SEDES, requested that the residents of the affected zone go immediately to the area health center if bitten by street [unowned] dogs or if canine rabies is suspected in the immediate family. Monasterio stated his concern that on 13 Feb [2012] the LIDIVET laboratory reported a positive rabies case in a street dog captured in the El Trigal neighborhood, whose owners have not been located. [ProMED-mail](#)

BPA in food packaging: FDA to decide by March 31

5 March - In late February, French lawmakers voted to ban the use of Bisphenol-A (BPA) in all food packaging. It was a gutsy move, putting the health of Europeans ahead of big-business interests. Better still, it may give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the nudge it needs to likewise vote to keep BPA away from Americans' food and drinks. BPA, an industrial chemical so ubiquitous it has been found in the urine of 93 percent of Americans, according to the Endocrine-Related Cancer Journal, mimics the female hormone estrogen. In studies, it has been linked to reproductive problems, prostate and other cancers, and problems in fetal brain development. A recent study from Harvard's School of Public Health found a link between behavioral issues in preschool-age girls and mothers with high BPA levels — the higher the mothers' BPA levels, the worse their daughters rated on standard behavior tests. The FDA has said it will decide by March 31 whether BPA should be banned from all U.S. food and beverage packaging — not because of the French ban, which will make exports of U.S. products such as meats, juices and frozen seafood problematic, but because of a 2008 lawsuit filed against the FDA by the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC). [Forbes](#)

Coca-Cola modifies caramel color to avoid cancer warning label

7 March - When the state of California added the compound 4-methylimidazole, also known as 4-MI or 4-MEI, to its list of known carcinogens in 2011, it created a problem for the soda industry. The caramel color they used to give colas that distinctive, brown hue contained levels of 4-MI that would have warranted a cancer warning label on every can

sold in the state. And this wasn't the industry's only challenge. The Center for Science in the Public Interest petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ban ammonia-sulfite caramel color. It's a request the CSPI repeated this week after finding 4-MI in samples of Coke and Pepsi. "This is nothing more than CSPI scare tactics, and their claims are outrageous," writes the American Beverage Association in a statement released to the media. "The science simply does not show that 4-MEI foods or beverages is a threat to human health," the statement continues. And the FDA seems to agree. FDA spokesman Douglas Karas wrote in a statement that the FDA is currently reviewing the CSPI petition, but "it is important to understand that a consumer would have to consume well over a thousand cans of soda a day to reach the doses administered in the studies that have shown links to cancer in rodents." [WBUR](#)

Kazakhstan: New foot-and-mouth disease hotbed found

28 February - Signs of foot-and-mouth disease were revealed in 26 head of cattle and 280 head of small cattle in the Ulken-Sulutor rural district in the Zhambyl region, Kazakh Emergency Situations Ministry said. "Information was received from the Ulken-Sulutor rural district in the Zhambyl region about revealing disease of animals with a diagnosis of "foot-and-mouth disease" in 26 head of cattle and 280 head of small cattle," the report says. According to the ministry, all the animals are isolated, tests were sent to the laboratory.

[Trend](#)

South Africa: Swine flu outbreak in Mpumalanga

8 March - Swazis, especially farmers, have been made aware of a threat of swine flu that has been reported in the Mpumalanga province, South Africa. According to SAPA, Mpumalanga farmers have been warned to keep all uninfected livestock away especially from pigs that are suspected to be infected. The news agency quotes eMbalenhle municipality spokesman Themba Motlhankana, saying this should be done in order to curb the spread of the virus. It is said last month about 100 pigs infected with the virus died at eMbalenhle extension 10 and were thrown into a local stream. This may have caused the virus to spread as the stream was a grazing area. The stream was subsequently disinfected. [Swazi Observer](#)

United Kingdom: Schmallenberg virus - nine more cases found



2 March - Nine more farms in the south of England have reported cases of a disease which causes birth defects and miscarriages in livestock, the government says. It means a total of 92 cases of the Schmallenberg virus have been reported in the UK. Two new cases are cattle, the others sheep, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said. Humans are thought to be unaffected by the virus, which is understood to be spread by midges, mosquitoes and ticks. [BBC News](#)

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Getting fat but staying fit?



7 March - Does being physically fit counteract some of the undesirable health consequences of being overweight? That question, of pressing interest to those of us who exercise while carrying a few extra pounds, prompted an important new study that focused on aerobic fitness and weight swings. [The study](#),

which was published last month in *The Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, examined health information about more than 3,100 adults who'd visited the Cooper Clinic in Dallas for medical checkups. During the exams, physicians gathered information about each person's cardiovascular health, including blood pressure, cholesterol profile, abdominal girth and body fat percentage. They also measured the patients' aerobic fitness using treadmill tests. [New York Times](#)

How exercise can change your DNA

7 March - Exercise does a lot of good things — it burns calories, helps keep your weight in check and lowers your risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Now add one more thing to the list: physical activity can change your DNA. Unlike the aberrations and genetic mutations caused by carcinogens and toxins, exercise-induced alterations to DNA are more like tune-ups, helping muscles to work better and more efficiently. What's more, these changes occur even after a single 20-minute workout. Juleen Zierath, a professor of physiology at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, reports with her colleagues in the journal *Cell Metabolism* about these very early changes that muscle cells undergo the first time you get off the couch and into the gym. [TIME](#)

Study links falls to hearing loss

2 March – Researchers have found an intriguing link between the risk of falling and hearing loss. Among aging populations, falls are a major health hazard. A stumble that might lead to just a painful bruise in a younger person can result in a broken hip, disability, and even death in older adults. Researchers analyzed data from an ongoing U.S. health study, called the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Lead author Frank Lin, of Johns Hopkins University, said he and his colleague, Luigi Ferrucci of the National Institute on Aging, compared measurements of hearing loss in adults age 40-69 with participants' response to questions about any recent falls they might have had. "And what we found is that someone's hearing ability is directly related to their chances of having falls in the past year," Lin said. "For someone with just even a mild hearing loss compared to normal hearing, they basically had about a three-fold increased chance of having falls over the past year." [VOA News](#)

Ghana: Two million malaria cases recorded in Ashanti in 2011

7 March - A total of two million cases of malaria in Out Patients Departments (OPDs) were recorded last year in the Ashanti Region. The figure represents a 50% increase from that of the preceding year, 2010, which recorded around one million cases. Giving the statistics at a media briefing organised to throw more light on the Door-to-Door Delivery and Hang-Up of Long-Lasting Insecticidal Net Campaign in Kumasi, the Regional Coordinator of the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP), Dr. Joseph Oduro, said the figures demonstrated the disturbing effects of the deadly disease, which continues to lead as the number killer of children and pregnant women in the country. Dr. Oduro said the alarming statistics further indicated that the country still had a long way to go in fighting the menace of the disease. [AllAfrica](#)

Madagascar: Tropical storm Irina claims 72 lives

7 March - Less than two weeks after being battered by Cyclone [Giovanna](#), another violent storm has swept over Madagascar killing 72 people and leaving 70,000 homeless, according to the National Disaster Risk Management Agency. Tropical storm Irina brought heavy rains, especially in the southeast of the country around the towns of Mananjary and Manakara, starting late on 26 February. While most people had been warned of Giovanna's destructive potential, Irina took the Indian Ocean island largely by surprise, destroying roads and houses already weakened by the first cyclone. Most of the casualties are in the southeastern town of Ifanadiana, where a mudslide engulfed dwellings and caused a traffic accident involving a minibus. Irina has brought the total death toll from Madagascar's current cyclone season, which usually runs from January to March, to over 100. [IRIN](#)

Nigeria: Tackling the Lassa fever epidemic

8 March - 43 years after the first case of Lassa fever was recorded, the country is still grappling with the virus that is transmitted by hairless tailed bush rats that abound in the country. With more than 40 lives already lost and over 400 others infected this year alone, Olaolu Olusina examines the inadequate surveillance system and lacklustre response to the killer virus which is responsible for some 5,000 deaths every year. Nigerians were indeed jolted when the news of a fresh outbreak of Lassa fever was broken by the Federal Ministry of Health about seven weeks ago. Many were further worried at the revelation that the disease, which had spread into 12 states including Edo, Taraba, Borno, Gombe, Yobe, Plateau, Nassarawa, Ebonyi, Ondo, Rivers, Anambra and Lagos States, was being transmitted through a species of bush rats. [This Day Live](#)

Republic of the Congo: Rescuers try to keep fire from 2nd depot



5 March - International experts fought Monday to prevent a fire from reaching a second arms depot in the capital of the Republic of Congo, a day after a blaze set off a series of explosions so violent they flattened buildings, killing hundreds and trapping countless others under the falling debris. Small

detonations continued to shake Brazzaville, though the blasts were not nearly as loud as those that had convulsed the city on Sunday, splitting beams, buckling numerous buildings including two churches, and causing windows to explode in a 3-mile (5-kilometer) radius of the depot... It's unclear how far the second depot is from the first, with some officials saying it is located in the same army barracks. A large crowd had gathered outside the municipal morgue, which along with a nearby hospital had registered 206 deaths hours after the first blast on Sunday. [ABC News](#)

Uganda: Tackling nodding disease

6 March - ..."Last year alone, 57 children dropped out of [this] school because they could not cope with the disease and they feared the mocking they were receiving from their fellow children. It is sad because the disease is affecting learning," explained Nyeko Richard Watmon, head of Aruu primary school. In Uganda, the disease is most prevalent in the districts of Kitgum, Pader and Lamwo. Some 3,097 children have been affected, of whom at least 170 have died – in many cases because the condition makes it impossible to eat - according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The syndrome has also been reported across the border in South Sudan. The cause and exact nature of the syndrome remain unknown, despite investigations by local and international actors. Investigations have ruled out toxic, infectious or nutritional factors. There are clear associations with Onchocerciasis, or river blindness: 93 percent of those with nodding syndrome live in areas where this disease is prevalent, and in both ailments a modest deficiency of vitamin B6 and of other micronutrients, such as zinc, vitamin A and selenium are common, [according to the WHO](#). Anti-epileptic drugs have been effective in treating nodding disease patients. [IRIN](#)

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USCENTCOM

Afghanistan: Avalanches kill 37



6 March - Avalanches killed 37 people and injured six in a remote part of the northeastern Afghan governorate of Badakhshan on 5 March, according to Abdul Marouf Rasekh, a spokesperson for Badakhshan's governor. The governor, who was visiting the area at the time, was trapped for hours before a helicopter rescued him. He was taken to the other side of the border in Tajikistan. "Right now 20 houses are completely covered with snow in Shirinazm village of Shekai District and

hundreds of other people are at risk of being trapped or killed by avalanches," Rasekh told IRIN, adding that Nesay District, close to the Tajik border, was also at risk. "Right now we are having an emergency meeting in the provincial capital, Faizabad, to find a way of helping the people in those remote districts," said Rasekh, adding that they would definitely need help from the UN and international aid organizations, though access would have to be by helicopter or via Tajikistan. [IRIN](#)

Yemen: Surge in measles deaths

5 March - Measles has killed 126 children in Yemen since mid-2011, a consequence of the breakdown of basic health services during the year-long political crisis. In response to the big increase in reported cases and deaths due to measles, the Yemeni government has appealed for international assistance and an outbreak-response vaccination campaign will begin in the hardest-hit regions on 10 March. "It's very sad that we were talking about elimination in 2010, and now we are dealing with an outbreak," said Arwa Baider, a child health programme officer at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). The latest statistics from the Health Ministry at the end of February report that 3,767 cases of measles have been confirmed, resulting in 126 deaths, since mid-2011. By comparison, in the three years from the beginning of 2007 until the end of 2009, the ministry reported a total of 211 cases and no deaths due to measles. [IRIN](#)

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USEUCOM

Scotland: Fewer premature births after smoking ban

6 March - Since Scotland introduced a ban on smoking in public places in 2006 there has been a 10% drop in the country's premature birth rate, say researchers. They believe this is a smoke-free benefit that can be chalked up alongside others, like reductions in heart disease and childhood asthma. Tobacco smoke has been linked to poor foetal growth and placenta problems. [Plos Medicine](#) analysed smoking and birth rates for all expectant women in Scotland before and after the ban. It included data for more than 700,000 women spanning a period of about 14 years. [BBC News](#)

United Kingdom: 50 years since UK warning, smoking still big killer



6 March - Fifty years after top doctors issued their first stark warning about the dangers of cigarettes, more than 20 percent of Britons still smoke -- and unless they quit, half of them will die from the habit, health experts on Tuesday. Smoking has killed more than six million people in Britain since 1962, when the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) published a landmark report about the health risks of tobacco. In a new report to mark the anniversary, the RCP said smoking rates have fallen

substantially in Britain the past 50 years, and at least 360,000 deaths from smoking have been prevented as people have accepted health advice and quit. Yet smoking is still the biggest avoidable killer in the UK, said the head of the RCP's tobacco advisory group John Britton, and some 10 million people are still addicted. [Reuters](#)

United Kingdom: Cancer fear and denial 'is killing thousands'

5 March - Thousands of people in the UK are dying unnecessarily because they are too scared to mention early symptoms of cancer to their doctor, say experts. A survey of 2,000 for Cancer Research UK suggests 40% might delay getting symptoms checked out because they are worried what the doctor might find. Yet early diagnosis is key to treating cancer successfully. Data suggest that if Great Britain matched Europe's best cancer survival rate 11,500 deaths could be avoided. [BBC News](#)

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USNORTHCOM

U.S.: Deaths from dangerous gut bacteria hit historic highs



6 March - Federal health officials Tuesday called on hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and doctors' offices to work harder to fight the spread of a dangerous bacterial infection that can cause life-threatening diarrhea and other complications. While other health-care related infections have been decreasing in recent years, cases of *Clostridium difficile*, or *C. diff*, continue rising, according to Clifford McDonald of the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). "It is a bacterium that also happens to form spores that produce toxins that affect the colon, the large intestine," Clifford said. According to a [new report](#) from the CDC, the number of Americans getting infected and hospitalized with *C. diff* has more than tripled, and the number dying has quadrupled in recent years. About 14,000 Americans die each year from the infection, according to the CDC. "It is now at historic highs," McDonald said. [NPR](#)

U.S.: FDA issues warning to 'breathable' caffeine maker

6 March - The Food and Drug Administration has warned a company that markets caffeine and vitamin B as "breathable energy" it could face regulatory action over "false and misleading" labeling. AeroShot comes in a lipstick-shaped dispenser that puffs out the white powdery mixture. Pre-filled devices can be purchased online or in convenience stores in New York and Boston for about \$3. AeroShot's website says the product "gives you a higher level of freedom and control that you can only get from airborne energy." However, elsewhere it explains, "the powder in AeroShot reaches your mouth where it is swallowed

and ingested." "Your labeling is false and misleading because your product cannot be intended for both inhalation and ingestion," the FDA charges in a letter to the manufacturer Breathable Foods. "Consumers may attempt to inhale your product, causing it to enter the lungs. FDA is concerned about the safety of any such use." The AeroShot packaging says the product is "not recommended for people ... under 18." But the FDA noted that the AeroShot website refers to "hitting the books" and "studying in the library" as activities that presumably could be enhanced by using the product. [CNN](#)

U.S.: Most doctors baffled by cancer screening stats

5 March - Most U.S. doctors fail to grasp simple statistics about cancer screening, which could boost their enthusiasm for unproven and potentially harmful tests, a new poll suggests. For instance, three-quarters of the more than 400 doctors surveyed believed better survival rates prove screening is a lifesaver although that's not the case, researchers say. And nearly half thought early detection translates into saving lives -- another common misperception. "This is really unfortunate because one of the things we always say is, 'Discuss it with your doctor,'" said Dr. Otis Brawley, chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society. "This is evidence that your doctor doesn't know." Brawley, who wasn't involved in the new survey, said the lack of statistical sophistication among doctors is part of the reason why prostate cancer screening, now a controversial practice, has become so widespread. "Misunderstanding of statistics has been fueling a great deal of screening," he told Reuters Health. "Unfortunately we have all been taught that the way to deal with cancer is to find it early. As we have learned more and more about cancer, we are starting to find that that's not true." [Medline Plus](#)

U.S., New York: What happened to the girls in Le Roy



7 March - Before the media vans took over Main Street, before the environmental testers came to dig at the soil, before the doctor came to take blood, before strangers started knocking on doors and asking question after question, Katie Krautwurst, a high-school cheerleader from Le Roy, N.Y., woke up from a nap. Instantly, she knew something was wrong. Her chin was jutting forward uncontrollably and her face was contracting into spasms... The numbers grew — 12, then 16, then 18, in a school of 600 ... Part of what is baffling about the Le Roy case is that it seems to combine two equally poorly understood phenomena: conversion disorder and mass psychogenic illness. Jennifer McVige, a doctor at the Dent Neurologic Institute in Buffalo who has seen 14 patients from Le Roy (neither Katie nor Thera is her patient), has said that most of them are dealing with serious stressors or trauma. That history is somewhat unusual for mass psychogenic illness, which is not generally thought to target people with a particular psychological background. In other ways, however, the case in Le Roy is a textbook example. Half of mass psychogenic illnesses occur in schools, and they are far more common in young women than any other category. [New York Times](#)

U.S.: Preventing *Clostridium difficile* infections

6 March - ...The incidence, mortality, and medical care costs of [*Clostridium difficile* infections] CDIs have reached historic highs (1,3,9,10). The estimated number of deaths attributed to CDI, based on multiple cause-of-death mortality data, increased from 3,000 deaths per year during 1999–2000 to 14,000 during 2006–2007, with more than 90% of deaths in persons aged ≥ 65 years (10). Recent excess health-care costs of hospital-onset CDI are estimated to be \$5,042–\$7,179 per case with a national annual estimate (limited to the subset of hospital-onset CDIs only) of \$897 million to \$1.3 billion (11). Much of the recent increase in the incidence and mortality of CDIs is attributed to the emergence and spread of a hypervirulent, resistant strain of *C. difficile* that produces greater quantities of principal virulence toxins A and B and has additional factors enhancing its virulence (9,12). Nonetheless, many of these infections can be prevented, as demonstrated by the 20% reduction in incidence of hospital-onset CDI among three state prevention programs conducted over approximately 21 months. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

U.S., Texas: Women in Texas losing options for health care in abortion fight

7 March - Leticia Parra, a mother of five scraping by on income from her husband's sporadic construction jobs, relied on the Planned Parenthood clinic in San Carlos, an impoverished town in South Texas, for breast cancer screenings, free birth control pills and pap smears for cervical cancer. But the clinic closed in October, along with more than a dozen others in the state, after financing for women's health was slashed by two-thirds by the Republican-controlled Legislature. The cuts, which left many low-income women with inconvenient or costly options, grew out of the effort to eliminate state support for Planned Parenthood. Although the cuts also forced clinics that were not affiliated with the agency to close — and none of them, even the ones run by Planned Parenthood, performed abortions — supporters of the cutbacks said they were motivated by the fight against abortion. [New York Times](#)

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USPACOM

China lead pollution poisons 160 children: report

5 March - Lead emission from factories and the natural environment in China's manufacturing heart of Guangdong has poisoned 160 children, Xinhua said on Sunday in the country's latest case of unfettered industrial toxins. Children from Dongtang town in Renhua county were found to have "elevated" levels of lead in their blood after inhaling lead-contaminated air and eating food tainted with lead, Xinhua said. The natural level of lead in Dongtang is also higher than usual as the town sits on a lead-zinc ore belt which raises the lead content in the soil, Xinhua said. The report did not name the factories responsible for the lead emissions and was based on preliminary investigations that tested

the blood samples of 531 residents last month. Lead poisoning is prevalent in China and has sparked protests in the past among angry parents of children hurt by heavy metal pollution. Lead is especially damaging to children as it can impede learning and affect behaviors. To counter widespread public anger, Beijing has promised to crack down on lead pollution. An industry body said last May China could shut three quarters of lead-acid battery plants in the next two or three years to cut local lead demand. China is the world's largest consumer of refined lead, with 70 percent used for making batteries. [Reuters](#)

Fiji: Typhoid outbreak

27 February - A public health emergency has been declared for two villages in Fiji - after an outbreak of typhoid in the Western Division. Under the ban - which will be reassessed after 30 days - mass gatherings and the slaughtering of animals are forbidden. World Health Organisation communicable diseases leader in Fiji, Dr Jacob Kool, told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat, typhoid is always a problem in Fiji. "Fiji has one of the highest rates in the world of typhoid fever," he said. "But we know it always gets worse when there is a natural disaster... People should not be using the river as a toilet as well as a source of drinking water and unfortunately in the Highlands of Fiji that is still a practise." [Radio Australia News](#)

Japan: Uncertain risks torment Japanese in nuclear zone

7 March - Yoshiko Ota keeps her windows shut. She never hangs her laundry outdoors. Fearful of birth defects, she warns her daughters: Never have children. This is life with radiation, nearly one year after a tsunami-hit nuclear power plant began spewing it into Ota's neighborhood, 40 miles (60 kilometers) away. She's so worried that she has broken out in hives. "The government spokesman keeps saying there are no IMMEDIATE health effects," the 48-year-old nursery school worker says. "He's not talking about 10 years or 20 years later. He must think the people of Fukushima are fools. "It's not really OK to live here," she says. "But we live here." Ota takes metabolism-enhancing pills in hopes of flushing radiation out of her body. To limit her exposure, she goes out of her way to buy vegetables that are not grown locally. She spends 10,000 yen (\$125) a month on bottled water to avoid the tap water. She even mail-ordered a special machine to dehusk her family's rice. Not everyone resorts to such measures, but a sense of unease pervades the residents of Fukushima. Some have moved away. Everyone else knows they are living with an invisible enemy. Radiation is still leaking from the now-closed Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, though at a slower pace than it did in the weeks after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. It's not immediately fatal but could show up as cancer or other illnesses years later.

[Official Wire](#)

Papua New Guinea: Poor eye care worsens rural suffering



5 March - Serious eye problems are affecting tens of thousands across the half-island Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and exacerbating suffering in rural areas, say health workers. "The need for treatment must be prioritized in this country as the number of people suffering from blindness or low vision is high and the problem is growing," the country's chief ophthalmologist, Simon Melenges, told IRIN. Almost 200,000 people nationwide have poor eye-sight or no vision;

many go without treatment due to inadequate eye-care facilities, specialists, surgical supplies and drugs. The state estimates it will cost nearly US\$8 million to provide eye care to those in need in 2012, with the cost expected to double by 2016 - this in a country where almost nine out of 10 people live in rural areas and are dependent on erratic farming income. [IRIN](#)

Philippines: Typhoid cases in Cebu continue to rise

7 March - The number of typhoid cases in the town of Tuburan, Cebu has climbed to 900, health officials said. Affected residents showing symptoms of typhoid fever flocked to hospitals to avail of free medicine... Barangay health workers, meanwhile, made the rounds to spread information on the proper use of sodium hypochlorite or bleach, commonly used as a disinfectant. Based on their findings, drinking water in Tuburan was positive for salmonella. The residents are now in need of mineral water. According to the health department, only 48% of more than 13,000 households in Tuburan utilize their own comfort room. [ABS-CBN News](#)

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USSOUTHCOM

Cuba to test new AIDS vaccine on humans

6 March - Cuba's top biotech teams have successfully tested a new AIDS vaccine on mice, and are ready to soon begin human testing, a leading researcher told a biotechnology conference in Havana. "The new AIDS trial vaccine already was tested successfully (on mice) and now we are preparing a very small, tightly controlled phase one clinical trial" with HIV-positive patients who are not in the advanced stages of disease, researcher Enrique Iglesias said yesterday. Iglesias, who heads up the vaccine development team at the Biotech and Genetic Engineering Center (CIGB) here, was speaking at the International Biotech Conference-Havana 2012, which started yesterday in Cuba's capital. He told the crowd at the convention center that the vaccine TERA-VAC-HIV-1 was made from recombinant proteins aiming "to cause a cellular response against the (HIV) virus." While upbeat, the Cuban expert was quick to downplay high hopes for a long-awaited successful AIDS vaccine. "So far, there have been more than 100 clinical tests (on humans) with HIV" in Cuba and other countries, "and all of them have failed," he stressed. Cuba, the Americas' only one-party Communist-ruled state, spends more than USD 200 million a year on its AIDS prevention and care programs, including free care with antiretrovirals, some of them Cuban-made. [The Siasat Daily](#)

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

