13 January 2012

Army Public Health Weekly Update

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

U.S. Army Public Health Command

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Tobacco Cessation Brochure

A new brochure that highlights the advantages in the deployed setting of quitting tobacco and points the reader toward help is now available in the **Health Information Products eCatalog.**

Armed Forces Public Health Conference

The US Army Public Health Command and the Navy & Marine Corps Public Health Center will host the Armed Forces Public Health Conference from **1-8 June 2012** at the Town & Country Resort in San Diego, CA.

Presentation abstracts must be uploaded to the **AFPHC website** by **13 January 2012**.

Poster abstracts must be uploaded to the **AFPHC website** by **19 March 2012**.

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.

U.S. MILITARY

Back from war, fear and danger fill driver's seat

10 January - ...For thousands of combat veterans, driving has become an ordeal. Once their problems were viewed mainly as a form of road rage or thrill seeking. But increasingly, erratic driving by returning troops is being identified as a symptom of traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder, or P.T.S.D. — and coming under greater scrutiny amid concerns about higher accident rates among veterans. The insurance industry has taken notice. In a review of driving records for tens of thousands of troops before and after deployments, USAA, a leading insurer of active-duty troops, discovered that auto accidents in which the service members were at fault went up by 13 percent after deployments. Accidents were particularly common in the six months after an overseas tour, according to the review, which covered the years 2007-2010... The Pentagon and Department of Veterans Affairs are also supporting several new studies into potential links between deployment and dangerously aggressive or overly defensive driving. New York Times

Supplement linked to soldiers' deaths

6 January - The Department of Defense has ordered on-base stores to temporarily halt the sale of products containing the stimulant dimethylamylamine (DMAA), found in some workout-enhancement and weight loss supplements, which has been linked to reports of death in two service members, a U.S. Army official confirmed yesterday. "Two soldiers who were using products which contain DMAA suffered cardiac arrest while exercising," said Col. John Lammie, M.D., director of health policy and services in the Office of the Army Surgeon General. "Both were found to have DMAA in their blood." He did not confirm a report in Army Times on Dec. 29 that DMAA might be linked to other incidents of adverse effects, specifically the collapse of three soldiers and two Marines during heavy exercise. However, the U.S. Army Medical Command Public Affairs reported on January 3 that concern centers on "reports of heat illness, kidney and liver damage, and sudden death in service members "who reportedly used products containing DMAA." Consumer Reports

Total Force Fitness model enhances warrior resilience

6 January - The Department of Defense (DoD) and service branches are focused on building and maintaining resiliency in service members, both at home and while deployed. Increasingly, service members are receiving instruction and training to build resiliency across the force. Following the Total Force Fitness (TFF) model, initiated by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Navy Adm. (Ret.) Michael Mullen and concurred by current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the eight domains of wellness are described as physical, nutritional, medical and dental, environmental, behavioral, psychological, social, and spiritual. Each domain is equally important in the overall wellness of the service member and is intimately related to the others. One way in which resiliency is being

emphasized is in physical fitness training. Army Sgt. Omar Estrada reported from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division on the Army's new physical resiliency training program in a recent article. Estrada detailed the practical changes being made to physically prepare soldiers to move in ways that mirror everyday activities in a battlefield environment. MHS

Urinary stones, Active Component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2001-2010

December 2011 - Urinary stones can cause debilitating morbidity that impairs the operational effectiveness of affected members of the U.S. Armed Forces. This report describes a "gender shift," i.e., the narrowing of prevalence differences between men and women, similar to trends described in the U.S. civilian population. Rates of incident diagnoses of urinary stones increased in the active component during the past decade – particularly among females. On average, 60 service members were medically evacuated from combat zones each year during the period. Service members with a history of urinary stones should be counseled on reducing risk, particularly in the deployment setting. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

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GLOBAL

200 million people using illicit drugs worldwide yearly, report

12 January - Some 200 million people worldwide use illicit drugs each year, according to the first paper in the Lancet Series on Addiction which addresses the global burden of disease due to illicit drug use. This figure represents one in 20 people aged 15-64 years, and use is highest in developed countries. Furthermore, the burden of disease due to drug use in high-income countries such as Australia is a sizeable proportion of that caused by alcohol consumption, but much less than that caused by tobacco. According to estimates made by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, cannabis use appears to be highest in Oceania (Australia/New Zealand) with up to 15% of 15-64 year olds using the drug, while opioid use including heroin was highest in the Near and Middle East (up to 1.4%). For amphetamines, again Oceania came out highest with up to 2.8% of this age group using drugs such as speed and crystal meth (but not including ecstasy), and cocaine use was highest in North America (1.9%). All Africa

Cholesterol meds raise diabetes risk in women: study

11 January - Post-menopausal women who take medication to lower their cholesterol face a higher risk of getting diabetes than women who do not take the popular drugs, known as statins, said a study on Monday. The risk was apparent even after researchers adjusted for variables such as age, race/ethnicity and body mass index, said the study in the Archives of Internal Medicine, a publication of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). The link appeared regardless of what type of statin, or what dosage, the women were taking, said the study which included 153,000 women with an average age of 63. The researchers from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota called for more study on the matter but said in the meantime there was no need to revise the guidelines for statin use in non-diabetic people, pointing out that statins aim to fix the negative heart consequences of diabetes. NY Daily News

New strategy being developed in the war on infectious diseases

11 January - Many of the drugs we use to fight infections lose their effectiveness as the targeted pathogens acquire resistance to them. So researchers have begun adopting a new strategy. Instead of using drugs to kill the offending pathogens, they're trying to design drugs that can block their entry into human cells before they can cause disease. Sooner or later, says Abhay Satoskar, a professor of pathology at Ohio State University, drug resistance becomes a problem in the battle against disease-causing organisms or pathogens. “Any time you have an agent that targets a pathogen, the pathogens are smart and eventually come up with a strategy to make that drug or agent ineffective,” said Satoskar. Most bacteria, viruses and parasites must enter human immune system cells to reproduce and cause illness. Satoskar is leading an effort at Ohio State to develop a compound that blocks a pathogen’s entry into the cells. The experimental drug targets a natural cell enzyme, called P13K, that allows pathogens to pass through the cell wall. The compound changes the chemical activity of P13K, blocking entry into cells. VOA News

Omega-3 fatty acids could prevent and treat nerve damage, research suggests

11 January - Research from Queen Mary, University of London suggests that omega-3 fatty acids, which are found in fish oil, have the potential to protect nerves from injury and help them to regenerate. When nerves are damaged because of an accident or injury, patients experience pain, weakness and muscle paralysis which can leave them disabled, and recovery rates are poor. The new study, published this week in the *Journal of Neuroscience**, suggests that omega-3 fatty acids could play a significant role in speeding recovery from nerve injury. The study focused on peripheral nerve cells. Peripheral nerves are the nerves which transmit signals between the brain and spinal cord, and the rest of the body. EurekAlert!

Spacecraft may crash into Indian Ocean

11 January - Russia is hoping a failed space probe will fall into the Indian Ocean, far away from any populated areas, but still has no guarantee of the crash site. Space agency Roscosmos said Wednesday that the midpoint in a three day window when Phobos-Ground's debris is expected to fall is at 0918 GMT Sunday, when the probe will be above the ocean, about 1,700 kilometers (some 1,050 miles) west of Jakarta... Phobos-Ground weighs 13.2 metric tons (14.6 tons), which includes 11 metric tons (12 tons) of highly toxic fuel. Experts had warned that if the fuel has frozen, it could survive re-entry through the atmosphere and pose a serious threat if it falls over populated areas. Roscosmos has insisted that it is sure that all the fuel will burn on re-entry some 100 kilometers (330,000 feet) above the ground and pose no danger. It said that a tiny quantity of Cobalt-57, a radioactive metal contained in one of the craft's instruments, will not pose the threat of radioactive contamination. TIME

Study: No sign that anthrax vaccine impaired health of lab workers

10 January - A survey study found no evidence that anthrax vaccination impaired the physical or mental health of laboratory workers within 30 months after they started the series of shots, according to a report in *Vaccine*. Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studied data from Laboratory Response Network (LRN) staff members who received Anthrax Vaccine Adsorbed (AVA) under a federal recommendation that was issued in 2002 (but was withdrawn in 2005, after a lawsuit forced a temporary suspension). The investigators enrolled 437 LRN workers who received the six-dose series of anthrax shots and 139 LRN workers who were not vaccinated. All the lab workers took a survey of physical and mental health, called SF-36v2, at 0, 12, and 30 months. Scores on the survey can range from 0 to 100, with an estimated national average of 50. For physical scores, the average change from baseline to 30 months was -1.09 for vaccinated persons and -1.97 for controls (P = .23). For mental functioning, the average change at 30 months was -2.11 for vaccinated workers and -0.24 for controls (P = .06). In a multivariable analysis, the difference in mental scores for vaccinees versus controls at 30 months was reduced (P = .37), but the other findings were similar. CIDRAP News Scan

Tracking infectious disease on Twitter

10 January - Haitians started dying of cholera just 10 months after the country's devastating earthquake. Researchers say health ministries might have responded more quickly had they seen evidence of the unfolding epidemic in an unlikely place: Twitter. Putting all publicly-available tweets with the word "cholera" and the hashtag "#cholera" on a timeline, researchers at Harvard Medical School were able to show a surge in cholera-related tweets early in the epidemic. The timeline correlates closely with later health-ministry tallies. The researchers used tweets from around the world - 65,728 total with the word "cholera" - that were sent between October 20 and November 3, 2010, including those that came from aid

organizations and/or media outlets in Haiti and elsewhere. The goal is to someday harness the immediacy of social media and use it to make better decisions early on about where to deploy public health resources, said Professor John Brownstein of Children's Hospital Boston and co-founder of HealthMap.org, which aggregates global information about infectious diseases. CNN Health

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

11 January 2012:

- Influenza-like illness (ILI) incidence rates continued to decrease within the MHS and influenza activity remains low across all overseas DoD laboratory surveillance networks.
- The influenza vaccination rate for the DoD (Active Duty component only) is 94%.
- CDC published updated guidance regarding surveillance of variant influenza A/H3 viruses. AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 52 (25-31 December 2011), influenza activity increased in the United States, but remains relatively low. FluView

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

During week 52 (26 December 2011 – 1 January 2012), low influenza activity was notified by all 24 countries reporting. Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview

Google helps emergency room docs to predict flu trends

11 January - Google, the search-engine giant, may be able to help doctors anticipate when they'll get a surge in the number of patients they see with flu symptoms. That's the new finding from a team of doctors, based in Baltimore, who relied on Google Flu Trends, a service that tracks the number of flu-related Internet searches by folks like you and me. In an article this month in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, those doctors, led by Dr. Richard Rothman, an emergency medicine physician at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine describe how data from Google Flu Trends stacked up against conventional systems to track the spread of flu. It did pretty

well. Plus, the service also had a major advantage over traditional surveillance: the Google data is updated every day and available to doctors almost instantly. TIME

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 7 January 2012:

Adenovirus

- Vaccination against types 4 and 7 adenovirus was instituted at all basic training centers by mid-November 2011 (week 45).
- Type 4 adenovirus remains the predominant cause of FRI among recruits at all training centers.
- Type 3 adenovirus is present at Ft. Jackson.
- 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

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

31 December – The 2011-2012 data continue to show a lower burden of respiratory disease than in 2010-2011. USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Indonesia: Avian influenza situation, WHO

11 January - The Ministry of Health of Indonesia has announced one new confirmed case of human infection with avian influenza A(H5N1) virus. The case is a 23 year-old male from Jakarta Province. He developed symptoms on 31 December 2011, was admitted to hospital on 6 January 2012 and died on 7 January 2012. An epidemiological investigation conducted by the Ministry of Health and local health officers indicated that he raised pigeons, and there was a sick pigeon he nursed that subsequently died. Laboratory tests have confirmed infection with avian influenza A(H5N1) virus. Of the 183 cases confirmed to date in Indonesia, 151 have been fatal. WHO

New swine flu, drug-resistant strains arising

10 January - The flu season hasn't kicked in yet, but infectious disease experts are on the alert for new strains of the virus, including another swine flu that's popped up in parts of the United States and a drug-resistant flu circulating in the Southern Hemisphere. Since the 2009 swine flu pandemic, public health and infectious disease experts have upped their surveillance of new flu strains, and they're paying close attention to what's happening

worldwide in hopes of being better prepared for the type of flu season that will hit here. "We haven't seen the emergence of, say, a new pandemic strain of influenza," said Dr. Charles Chiu, head of the viral diagnostics laboratory at University of California, San Francisco. "But we've been getting these worrisome trickles of reports," which "are all reminders that influenza still poses a big threat." Sun-Times

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Antibiotics for livestock vital to feed world, OIE

11 January - The world body in charge of fighting animal diseases called for action against widespread abuse of antibiotics in livestock farming, which leads to drug-resistant bacteria, but warned on Wednesday that a ban would leave the world short of protein. "The use of antibiotics is today essential to ensure sufficient animal production to feed the planet. Without antibiotics there would supply problems of animal protein for the human population," Bernard Vallat, director of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) told a news conference. Antibiotics are widely used in cattle, pigs and poultry to prevent or cure diseases and in many regions to boost output as several of them have side-effects that increase growth speed. Scientists say overuse of antibiotics can allow resistant strains of bacteria to become dominant, undermining the efficacy of the drugs. The debate over the impact of the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry has intensified in recent weeks with several countries, including the United States and Germany, taking or considering new measures to control it. Reuters

U.S.: Confiscated bushmeat 'poses virus threat'

11 January - Scientists have documented potentially dangerous viruses entering the US through illegally imported wildlife products. Testing of meats confiscated at American airports has revealed the presence of several pathogens that could pose a risk to human health. Retroviruses and herpesviruses were identified, some of them isolated from remains of endangered monkey species. The research study is reported in the journal PLoS One. BBC News

USDA to trim food safety offices in economy move

10 January - The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to close five of its 15 district Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) offices to save money and boost efficiency, a move that officials said will not impair meat and poultry plant inspections. The five district offices in five states are among 259 USDA offices targeted for closure under the "Blueprint for Stronger Service," which was detailed by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in a speech

yesterday to the American Farm Bureau Federation. The plan is expected to save about $150 million annually, the agency said. Also targeted for closure are 15 of 560 Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) offices in 11 states and 12 of 240 Agricultural Research Service programs. CIDRAP News

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WELLNESS

Best way to boost adult immunizations is through office-based action, study finds

11 January - Promoting immunizations as a part of routine office-based medical practice is needed to improve adult vaccination rates, a highly effective way to curb the spread of diseases across communities, prevent needless illness and deaths, and lower health care costs, according to a new RAND Corporation study. Increasingly, vaccinations are being offered outside of physician offices at pharmacies, workplaces and retail medical clinics. Even so, office-based medical practice continues to be central to the delivery of recommended vaccinations to adults. "Regardless of where vaccines are actually administered, office-based providers are uniquely positioned to identify patients who need vaccination, to communicate credibly about the benefits and risks of vaccination, and to ensure that vaccination histories are properly maintained," said Katherine Harris, the study's lead author and a senior economist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. EurekAlert!

Binge drinking: Risky and widespread

10 January - Binge drinking in America looks to be an even bigger problem than we thought. About 1 in 6 Americans, or 17 percent of the population, went on at least one drinking binge in a month last year, according to the latest figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That works out to 38 million people. The same nationwide survey conducted in 2009 found that about 15 percent of Americans had indulged in a drinking binge. How many drinks make a binge? For a woman, it's four or more at a sitting. For men, it's five and up. Now, how come there's an apparent 2-percentage-point jump in binge drinking in one year? The CDC says a big factor is that the survey methods were tweaked to add more cellphone users to the mix. They tend to be younger. NPR

Increase dietary fiber, decrease disease

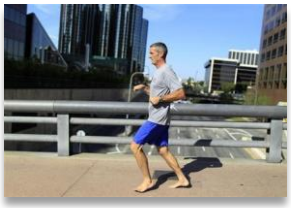
22 January - We should all be eating more dietary fiber to improve our health - that's the message from a health review by scientists in India. The team has looked at research conducted into dietary fiber during the last few decades across the globe and now suggests that to avoid initial problems, such as intestinal gas and loose stool, it is best to increase intake gradually and to spread high-fiber foods out throughout the day, at meals and snacks. Writing in the *International Journal of Food Safety, Nutrition and Public Health*, the

team offers fruit, vegetables, whole-grain foods, such as muesli and porridge, beans and pulses, as readily available foods rich in dietary fiber. EurekAlert!

Nicotine patches, gum don't prevent relapse, study finds

9 January - Among adults who stopped smoking, those who had used nicotine replacement products were just as likely to start again as those who quit cold turkey. Smokers who count on nicotine patches or gum to help them quit may want to reconsider: A new study finds that these and other nicotine replacement products aren't effective at preventing former smokers from relapsing in real-world conditions. Among 787 adults who had quit smoking within the previous two years, nearly a third reported having returned to using cigarettes, according to a study published online Monday by the journal Tobacco Control. Those who had used nicotine patches, gum, inhalers or nasal sprays were just as likely to relapse as those who had quit without them, researchers from Harvard University and the University of Massachusetts found. Los Angeles Times

To optimize exercise, heed your heart rate training zone



9 January - Whether you're interested in running a marathon or staving off the chronic diseases of ageing, to reap the rewards of your efforts getting into the zone is essential. Experts say knowing and staying within your heart rate training zone is an easy way to pace the intensity of your workout. "Exercisers need to get to at least a moderate level of physical activity in order to reap the benefits," said Dr. Adrian Hutber of the American College of Sports Medicine. "Your goal is to get to a stage where you're fit enough to exercise within your heart rate training zone." Your heart rate training zone, or target heart rate, is based on your maximum heart rate (MHR), which is roughly calculated as 220 minus your age. "It's not exact but it doesn't need to be," said Hutber. "It's a really good indicator." For moderate-intensity physical activity, a person's target heart rate should be 50 to 70 percent of MHR, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vigorous exercisers should aim for 70 to 85 percent. Reuters

Red wine-heart research slammed with fraud charges

12 January - A University of Connecticut researcher who studied the link between aging and a substance found in red wine has committed more than 100 acts of data fabrication and falsification, the university said Wednesday, throwing much of his work into doubt. Dipak K. Das, who directed the university's Cardiovascular Research Center, studied resveratrol, touted by a number of scientists and companies as a way to slow aging or remain healthy as people get older. Among his findings, according to a work promoted by the University of Connecticut in 2007, was that "the pulp of grapes is as heart-healthy as the skin, even though the antioxidant properties differ." "We have a responsibility to correct the scientific record and inform peer researchers across the country," Philip Austin, the university's interim vice president for health affairs, said in a statement. Reuters

When injuries to the brain tear at hearts

9 January - ...Until recently, there had been little evidence-based research on how to rebuild marriages after [a brain injury]. Indeed, doctors frequently warn uninjured spouses that the marriage may well be over, that the personality changes that can result from brain injury may do irreparable harm to the relationship... Contrary to conventional wisdom, many relationships do survive after a spouse suffers a brain injury. Some studies find divorce rates well below the national average among these couples. A 2007 investigation found that the divorce rate was around 17 percent in couples followed for as long as 90 months after a spouse sustained a brain injury. That is not to say these couples are always happy. "Two or three years later, they want a whole lot more than simply to be alive," said an author of the 2007 study, Jeffrey S. Kreutzer, a psychologist at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. "While people may technically be married, the quality of their relationship has been seriously diminished." New York Times

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USAFRICOM

Cote d'Ivoire: Blood shortages causing deaths in West

4 January - Blood shortages at hospitals and health centres in western Côte d'Ivoire are causing unnecessary deaths, especially among children, say local and international health officials. Eighty-six people in need of blood transfusions died at the main hospital in the western city of Man during the first 11 months of 2011, with three-quarters of the deaths being children, hospital records showed. "A lot of people are dying in the west due to the lack of blood and lack of access to blood," said Bisimwa Ruhana-Mirindi, coordinator of the World Health Organization (WHO) health cluster. Post-election violence in 2011 made access to blood nearly impossible for several months, Ruhana-Mirindi added. Residents feared travelling to hospitals or to the region's only blood bank in Daloa (180km from Man) because armed groups continued to man illegal checkpoints; routine blood collection campaigns halted. Records show that of the 923 people who needed blood transfusions at Man hospital, 19 percent failed to receive the service, and half that number died. All Africa

Tanzania: More than 130,000 young people are HIV positive

11 January - The Tanzania Commission for Aids (Tacaids) executive chairperson, Dr Fatma Mrisho, said that this called for concerted efforts to equip them with information and services based on specific needs and situations. Current national statistics show that 60 per cent of all new HIV/Aids infections involve young people below 24 years of age. It is estimated that 32 per cent of Tanzanians are between 10 and 24 years old. Dr Mrisho observed that young people needed to access appropriate non-judgmental information guiding them for a healthy productive life. Speaking at the launch of a booklet titled "Young

People Living with HIV and Aids" yesterday in Dar es Salaam, she said Aids among the youth was worrying. The booklet was published under the Tanzanian German Programme to Support Health (TGPSH) of the German Cooperation Office. Dr Mrisho noted: "Most young people, especially young women living with HIV/Aids, do not have full information. The situation is worse for young people belonging to marginalised groups and those in most risk situations." According to her, young people with HIV/Aids continue living in fear thinking that they will not be able to meet their dreams. She added that awareness will help them understand themselves better. All Africa

Tanzania: Shortage of doctors alarming

11 January - The shortage of health workers in the country has alarmed the government, which is moving to recruit more medical personnel in order to reach the ratio of having one medical doctor attending 10,000 people. This, according to President Jakaya Kikwete, would be done hand in hand with offering specialty training to ensure that it also curbs the acute shortage of cardiovascular specialists highly facing this country. Opening the first international conference on cardiovascular diseases in Dar es Salaam yesterday, President Kikwete said in order to complement the efforts, the government has decided to build another School of Medicine at the University of Dodoma as a way of helping in curbing the shortage of medics in the country. Various cardiovascular diseases specialists are attending the three-day conference with a theme 'Prevention, Advanced diagnostic procedures and minimal invasive treatment: The future of cardiovascular disease care in East Africa'. "We need more cardiovascular practitioners, as the data we have concerning the increase of the disease are scary. We need to start doing something instead of waiting for more hazards," President Kikwete told the conference. All Africa

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USCENTCOM

Afghanistan's poor face difficult decisions amid winter cold

9 January - Seasonal hardship is nothing new for Afghans, but a combination of factors is making this winter harder than usual to bear. The number of refugees from other parts of the country, known as internally displaced people, has ballooned to an estimated half a million. Many end up in the capital after fleeing fighting elsewhere, and make their homes in slum encampments that authorities euphemistically call "settlements." Parwan Du, where Shoaib's family lives, began as a few tents on an open lot, some using crumbling mud-brick walls as supports for flimsy shelters made of plastic sheeting and plywood. Now it is home to about 230 people, some of whom have been there for years. With the city's population thought to have tripled to about 4

million during this decade of war, the few services on offer are stretched thin. Electricity falters; potholed streets grow more impassable as newly fallen snow turns to icy slush and then to clinging mud before the cycle begins again. Prices of staples such as cooking oil have lately jumped, driven up in part by a Pakistani border blockade, imposed after U.S. airstrikes accidentally killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November. LA Times

Pakistan: Call for exploring linkages between health, poverty

12 January - Experts at a seminar Wednesday called for a comprehensive inquiry to explore linkages between health and poverty and factors that negatively influence health sector outcomes. The seminar titled "poverty and social impact of expanded programme for immunization in Pakistan" was organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI). "Immunization is the most cost effective health intervention against preventable diseases affecting the poor sections of society", said the experts. They stressed on researchers to identify gaps with empirical evidences and recommendations for policy makers to improve health situation in the country. Experts talked about very low percentage of birth registration and very low percentage of vaccination card recall in Pakistan and said that polio campaign must derive from households instead of government push. They also demanded to make vaccination cards mandatory for admission in schools at kindergartens' level and proposed to link polio campaign with incentives for people. Pakistan Observer

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USEUCOM

70 percent of Europeans suffer from low vitamin D levels

10 January - A group of experts has prepared a report on vitamin D supplementation for menopausal women after it was revealed that Europeans have suffered an alarming decrease in their levels of this vitamin. In their opinion, the ideal would be to maintain blood levels above 30 ng/ml. Vitamin D is essential to the immune system and processes such as calcium absorption. "We believe that many diseases can be aggravated by a chronic deficiency of vitamin D," states Faustino R. Pérez-López, researcher at the University of Zaragoza. In particular, this is worse during the menopause as low levels of vitamin D in the blood are associated with an increased risk of osteoporosis, loss of motor coordination and bone fractures. Vitamin D deficiency is a real problem in Europe as levels in the blood are low in 50% to 70% of the population. Pérez-López points out that "healthcare professionals should be aware that this is a common problem which affects a large part of the population in Europe, even those who live in sunny places." EurekAlert!

Greece disability list sparks welfare benefits row

10 January - A Greek government plan to categorise paedophiles and pyromaniacs as "disabled" has alarmed disability groups, who fear it could undermine their state benefits. The new code could be used "to cut the number of disabled people with a right to disability benefits", the groups' national leader, Yannis Vardakastanis, told BBC News. Indebted Greece is slashing state aid. Disabled Greeks rallied in December, demanding job and benefit protection. Mr Vardakastanis, head of the National Confederation of Disabled People, said the new code would simplify the definition of disability, limiting it to medical conditions. BBC News

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USNORTHCOM

U.S., Alaska: Alaska snow and ice cuts off Cordova and Nome

11 January - Extreme winter weather has left one Alaskan town battling huge snowdrifts and forced another to seek fuel supplies from a Russian tanker. National Guard troops are in Cordova, helping the town dig out after fresh snowfalls on Tuesday added to the 18ft (5.5m) that has fallen since November. A US Coast Guard icebreaker and a Russian tanker are trying to resupply Nome, cut off by thick sea ice. The town is running out of fuel after a previous storm blocked a shipment. BBC News

U.S.: Diabetes' economic toll goes far beyond medical bills

9 January - now most people have probably heard the dire predictions about how much the growing prevalence of diabetes will cost the U.S. health system in the coming years and decades. But a new study from researchers at Yale suggests that the disease, which currently affects nearly 8 percent of the U.S. population, could have significant nonmedical costs to society as well. The study, which appears in the January issue of the policy journal *Health Affairs*, suggests that young people diagnosed with the disease are more likely to drop out of high school and to forgo or fail to finish college. As a result, they're likely to earn less than those without diabetes. NPR

U.S.: Murder knocked off list of top U.S. killers, CDC

11 January - A respiratory illness that strikes the elderly knocked homicide off the list of the top killers in the United States for the first time in 45 years in 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Wednesday. In its annual report on U.S. mortality, the CDC said a condition known as pneumonitis had replaced murder as a leading cause of death in the country. The drop in deaths by homicides was expected. Last month, the FBI released a preliminary report on U.S. crime rates for 2010 that showed a 7.1 percent drop in murder between January and June, part of a wider drop in violent crime despite the country's ongoing economic troubles. The drop in murder rates -- and a corresponding rise in pneumonitis -- forced homicide off the government's annual list of top 15 killers for the first time since the mid-1960s. Murder was relegated to 16th place in 2010 with 16,065 killings. Reuters

U.S.: Postneonatal mortality among Alaska native infants — Alaska, 1989–2009

13 January - Alaska's postneonatal mortality rate of 3.4 deaths per 1,000 live births during 2006–2008 was 48% higher than the 2007 U.S. rate of 2.3 per 1,000 (1,2). Among American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) infants, the Alaska rate of 8.0 per 1,000 was 70% higher than the U.S. rate of 4.7. The Alaska Division of Public Health analyzed a linked birth-infant death file for 1989–2009 to examine temporal trends in postneonatal mortality in Alaska, specifically in the Alaska Native (AN) population. Overall and non-Alaska Native (non-AN) rates declined during the entire period, but no significant trends in AN-specific mortality were apparent. Infant mortality review committee findings indicated a decline during 1992–2007 among all postneonatal deaths attributed to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) or sudden unexplained infant death (SUID), but not for other causes. Lack of progress in reducing postneonatal mortality, particularly among AN infants, indicates a need for renewed emphasis within the Alaska health-care community. Current initiatives to reduce preventable causes of postneonatal mortality should be evaluated and successful models more widely implemented. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: Study needed on shale gas effects on health

10 January - The public health effects of shale gas development need to be rigorously studied as production rapidly spreads in the United States, public health professionals and advocates said on Monday. Advances in the hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, drilling technique have revolutionized the natural gas industry, but researchers said more must be done to evaluate what the shale boom means for the those living near wells. Health groups have concerns including possible air and water pollution from fracking, especially since some operations take place very close to homes and schools. Reuters

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Bangladesh: Trying to stay polio-free

11 January - Mobile health teams in Bangladesh are conducting "child-to-child" searches to reach the remaining half million children not vaccinated during a nationwide polio immunization campaign launched on 7 January. The campaign's goal was to vaccinate 22 million children under five. Only 560,791 children short of reaching it, mobile teams have been conducting house visits, concluding on 11 January, to vaccinate the remainder, Arun Bhadra Thapa, World Health Organization's country representative, told IRIN. IRIN

China stops unapproved stem cell treatments

10 January - China has ordered a halt to all unapproved stem cell treatments and clinical trials, state media reported on Tuesday, as Beijing seeks to rein in the largely untested stem cell therapies now on offer across the country. The Ministry of Health will stop accepting new applications for stem cell programs, a ban that will last until July and comes as China begins a one-year program to regulate the sector better, Xinhua cited a ministry spokesman as saying. A growing number of hospitals and clinics in large cities in China have been offering stem cell therapies for treatment of diseases ranging from cancer and Alzheimer's to spinal cord injuries, treatments that are backed by little or no scientific evidence and which are considered at best experimental. Some of these involve large general hospitals where patients pay thousands -- or even tens of thousands -- of dollars for treatments that are advertised online, which attract both Chinese patients and those from overseas, sparking what experts say is a dubious type of medical tourism...The ministry spokesman said health providers could no longer charge money for experimental stem cell applications under the new order, which was jointly issued by China's State Food and Drug Administration (SFDA). Reuters

India: Dengue-chikungunya virus co-infections

11 January - Cases of dengue-chikungunya [virus] co-infection are on the rise, causing concern to health planners and doctors. About 3 per cent of dengue-chikungunya cases fall under the co-infection category, with the patient suffering from both the diseases at the same time. Incidentally, the same _Aedes aegypti_ mosquito transmits both the dengue and the chikungunya virus; chances of co-infection are higher if the mosquito carries the viruses of both the diseases. A detailed analysis of dengue and chikungunya cases by the department of microbiology, Sri Venkate-swara Institute of Medical Sciences, Tirupati has revealed that the problem of co-infection is more pronounced in areas where both viruses co-circulate. Where co-infection strikes, doctors find it hard to diagnose the problem. Though symptoms of these diseases are common, their outcome differs. Tests for both dengue and chikungunya [virus infections] will help in finding whether a patient is suffering from one disease or both of them. Chikungunya is non-fatal, while dengue may lead to

severe complications including death. The common symptoms of both the diseases include fever, joint and bone pain, nausea, vomiting, headache, and fatigue [However, acute joint pain that may persist for weeks or months is more characteristic of chikungunya virus infections. - Mod.TY]... ProMED-mail

India: TB that resists all drugs is found

11 January - Tuberculosis specialists in India have diagnosed infections in a dozen patients in Mumbai that are unfazed by the three first-choice TB drugs and all nine second-line drugs. The doctors are calling them "totally drug-resistant TB," and the infections are essentially incurable with all available medicines. It's a sobering development. Infectious disease specialists say there will surely be more such cases in India and other countries where cases of TB that resist some but not all drugs are being inadequately treated. Poor care is fueling the development of the superbugs. "The vast majority of these unfortunate patients seek care from private physicians in a desperate attempt to find a cure for their tuberculosis," the Indian specialists write in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. "The majority of these prescriptions were inappropriate and would only have served to further amplify resistance." NPR

India's polio victory fuels endgame vaccine talks

12 January - When the clocks strike midnight in New Delhi on January 12, India will mark the first year in history it has recorded no new cases of polio. It's a huge milestone for a country many experts thought would be the last place on earth to get rid of the crippling virus. And it's an exciting step forward for global health workers battling to make polio only the second human infectious disease after smallpox to be eradicated. "If all the data comes in clear over the next few weeks, then India, for the first time, will show up as an unshaded area on WHO polio maps," said Sona Bari of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Global Polio Eradication Initiative. "This is a great start to the year for India." But while India celebrates, global health authorities are debating how to reduce the risk that vaccines containing live viruses may reintroduce the disease to places only just becoming polio-free. Reuters

Indian PM: Malnutrition a matter of 'national shame'

10 January - India's prime minister says malnutrition is a national shame, as a new survey finds that 42 percent of India's children are underweight. India has long ranked low on the global hunger index but, an alliance of lawmakers, eminent citizens and voluntary groups hopes to change that. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in New Delhi Tuesday that levels of hunger remain too high in India despite impressive economic growth. He was releasing the Hunger and Malnutrition Survey, which underlines widespread malnutrition in the country. “What concerns me and what must concern all enlightened citizens is that 42 percent of our children are still underweight," Singh said. "This is an unacceptably high occurrence, and I repeat, the problem of malnutrition is a matter of national shame.” VOA News

Indonesia: 7.3 quake hits again, but this time residents are better prepared

11 January - Just hours after a 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of western Indonesia early Wednesday morning, stirring panic and a tsunami alert but leaving no visible damage, life had returned to normal. It was a forceful reminder for residents of Banda Aceh, the city closest to the devastating 2004 earthquake and Indian Ocean tsunami that killed more than 230,00 across South East Asia. But despite lingering fears of the Dec. 26, 2004 monster wave that killed roughly 170,000 people in Aceh alone and altered the social fabric of the region, Rahmadi, who owns a small perfume shop in Banda Aceh says people are more prepared than they were a little over six years ago because of government programs. "My parents put all our important things to a bag, and they know which road to use to escape," says Rahmadi. Christian Science Monitor

Japan planning breast milk radiation tests

12 January - Government officials say they are considering widespread testing of breast milk samples of new mothers in Fukushima Prefecture, home of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The details have yet to be finalized, according to a spokesman at the prefecture, who declined to give his name as is customary in Japan. But the spokesman said the prefecture is working out a plan to obtain samples of the breast milk from new mothers in the region. Mothers in the prefecture have publicly held protests, expressing outrage over possible health effects of radiation from the plant affecting their newborns. About 18,000 babies are born each year in the prefecture. About half of those babies, according to the government, are breastfed. A survey conducted in May and June by Japan's national government found traces of radioactive cesium in the breast milk of seven of 21 mothers in Fukushima. Experts say the minute amounts posed no health risks to babies. CNN News

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USSOUTHCOM

Haiti cholera reports explore social media, likely index patient

10 January - To observe the second anniversary of an earthquake that devastated parts of Haiti, the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* has published a section on Haiti in its January issue, which includes a commentary on the cholera outbreak and reports on how media sources tracked the outbreak in its early stages and on a patient suspected to be the first case in the outbreak. CIDRAP News Scan

Haiti: Two years on, Haiti still reeling from quake

12 January - The United Nations estimated the 7.0-magnitude earthquake affected nearly 3 million people and killed about 220,000. More than 1.5 million people were left homeless in a country that was already the poorest in the Western hemisphere and wracked by crisis. Consider that 70% of Haitians did not have stable jobs before the quake and there were only 5.9 doctors per 10,000 residents. Two years later, almost as many Haitians are still unemployed. Debris still clutters the capital and other places. About half the rubble, the equivalent of five football stadiums full, has been removed, according to the United Nations. About half a million people are still homeless. Many still live in tents in the shadows of the collapsed presidential palace, perhaps the most visible symbol of Haiti's misery. "You can't stay on the streets," Leocal said. "If that's what you have, you have to rebuild." CNN News

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