

17 February 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.

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Disease Surveillance Workshop

USAPHC and Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center will host the first of monthly workshops for those who conduct disease surveillance within their community.

Participants can attend either session of the first training on 28 February at 0900 hours EST and 1500 hours EST. The workshop will cover how to use the new reporting and graphing functions within DRSi. Those who wish to participate can connect via DCO and telecon.

More information



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U.S. MILITARY

Dental readiness

13 February - Dental readiness is one of the components of Medical Readiness. Dental readiness supports three of the Army's four ARFORGEN imperatives, namely Sustain, Prepare, and Reset, because dental problems may impair a Soldier's ability to function. The [Dental Readiness Information Center](#) (DRIC) is a comprehensive information website designed to assist any Soldier - Active, Reserve, or National Guard - and their unit commanders in maintaining their own dental readiness... A sample survey of military personnel conducted in the Fall of 2010, found that 33 percent of Soldiers had experienced pain from dental problems in the last six months. Dental issues caused sleep loss and

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](#)

difficulty in eating for 25 percent of Soldiers, impaired duty performance for about 21 percent, and work loss for 18 percent. Deployed Soldiers with oral disease often require medical evacuation for treatment, endangering themselves and others. The likelihood of a Soldier having lost duty time, due to a dental emergency, increases as their oral disease worsens. [Stand-To!](#)

Malaria vectors and malaria testing

January 2012 - malaria is transmitted by certain mosquito species of the genus Anopheles. The Anopheles species shown here are common in areas of deployment operations. Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water in both urban and rural environments. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

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GLOBAL

Chemo during pregnancy doesn't seem to harm baby



10 February - A new study finds that the babies of women who had chemotherapy while pregnant aren't at higher risk for a variety of medical disorders, a sign that the treatment should be safe for the fetus in most instances. There's a caveat: babies born to pregnant women who had chemotherapy were more likely to be born prematurely, potentially putting them at risk for impaired brain development, which can cause problems with memory, thinking and learning skills. Still, the findings are "very good news," said maternal-fetal medicine specialist Dr. Elyce Cardonick, who wrote a commentary accompanying the study. [Medline Plus](#)

Containing the world's deadliest microbes

15 February - ...Labs whose experiments on dangerous pathogens are funded by the U.S. government must follow specific rules to keep the microbes from escaping, but those rules are not enforceable for researchers working with private funds. Outside the country, security and safety requirements vary widely, experts say. "It's all subject to interpretation," said a scientist close to the U.S. National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity, which monitors research that might pose a bioterrorism threat. If a lab receiving U.S. government funding violates the guidelines, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can cut off the flow of money, "but it can't shut you down," the scientist said. "I don't have a lot of confidence in our biosafety right now." [Chicago Tribune](#)

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American Journal of Public Health

The March 2012 issue of the American Journal of Public Health is featuring articles of the topic of suicide risk among veterans of military service.



INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

15 February:

- Influenza activity remains low across all overseas DoD laboratory surveillance networks.
- The influenza vaccination rate for the DoD (Active Duty component only) is 95%. [AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 5 (29 January – 4 February 2012), influenza activity in the United States increased. [FluView](#)

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

During week 5 (30 January – 5 February 2012), medium influenza activity was reported by 11 countries and increasing trends by 18 countries. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 11 February 2012:

Adenovirus

- 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

11 February – The 2011-2012 data continue to show a lower burden of respiratory disease than in 2010-2011.

- Viral specimens: During week six, 211 specimens were submitted for testing, of which 23 returned positive results. Influenza A was found in 13 (57%) of these positive samples.
- Influenza cases: 95 influenza cases have been reported in DRSI through week six of the 2011-2012 season. Six were reported with onset dates in week 6.
- Outpatient ILI surveillance: ILI activity within ESSENCE indicates both AD and beneficiary visits were lower this year than last year at this time. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

**COCA Webinar -
2011-2012 Influenza
Season: Antiviral
Medication
Recommendations**

Evidence consistently indicates that antiviral treatment, when initiated as early as possible in patients with confirmed or suspected influenza, can reduce severe outcomes of influenza.

During this COCA conference call, a subject matter expert will review current Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and CDC guidance on the use of antiviral medications in the prevention and treatment of influenza

Date: February 28, 2012

Time: 2:00 – 3:00 pm
(Eastern Time)

Call Number: 800-779-7163

Passcode: 7319016

[Join the Webinar](#)



U.S.: Flu season may peak in three weeks

14 February - The flu season is off to the slowest start in three decades, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). But get ready for an uptick. Last week, for the first time this year, the CDC found 10-percent of patients tested positive for the flu, which is an indication flu season is beginning. Cases of the cold and flu have been mild this year compared to last year. Dr. Pat Courneya, a family physician, said warm weather could be a factor but also because more people have had the flu shot. He warns that while the weather has been unusual, the lack of winter related illnesses is not. "When you look back over the last 30 years...it's not terribly unusual for things to be pretty quiet and then begin to get very active later on in the season and that may be the case this year," he said. Courneya expects the flu to peak in the next three weeks. [KARE](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Decision time for researchers of deadly bird flu

15 February - When 22 bird flu experts meet at the World Health Organization this week, they will be tasked with deciding just how far scientists should go in creating lethal mutant viruses in the name of research. The hurriedly assembled meeting is designed to try to settle an unprecedented row over a call to ban publication of two scientific studies which detail how to mutate H5N1 bird flu viruses into a form that could cause a deadly human pandemic. But experts say whatever the outcome, no amount of censorship, global regulation or shutting down of research projects could stop rogue scientists getting the tools to create and release a pandemic H5N1 virus if they were intent on evil. "It doesn't matter how much you restrict scientists from doing good, bad people can still do bad things," said Wendy Barclay, an expert in flu virology at Imperial College London. The WHO called the meeting, for February 16 and 17 in Geneva, to work out how to break a deadlock between scientists who have studied the mutations needed to make H5N1 transmit between mammals and U.S. biosecurity chiefs who want their work censored or "redacted" before it goes into scientific journals. [Reuters](#)

Scientists find link between La Niña and the flu

14 February - Weather patterns could have an influence on the spread of epidemics like that of the H1N1 influenza virus, initially known as swine flu, which broke out in Mexico and the United States in 2009. That is the hypothesis set forth in a scientific article that calls for research into the links between weather variations, bird migration, and influenza pandemics. "We examined the four most recent human influenza pandemics (1918, 1957, 1968 and 2009) and found that each pandemic occurred in spring or early summer and was preceded by below-normal sea surface temperatures, indicative of the La Niña phase," Jeffrey Shaman of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health told *Tierramérica*... "Migratory birds, with their long travel distances and many stopovers, are thought to be particularly critical for the mixing and reassortment of influenza virus genomes," the authors add.

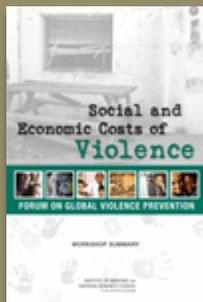
[AlertNet](#)

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Social and Economic Costs of Violence: Workshop Summary

Measuring the social and economic costs of violence can be difficult, and most estimates only consider direct economic effects, such as productivity loss or the use of health care services.

Communities and societies feel the effects of violence through loss of social cohesion, financial divestment, and the increased burden on the healthcare and justice systems.



VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

China probes "bouncing" boiled eggs

10 February - Chinese authorities are investigating eggs which bounce after being boiled and may make men sterile, state media reported Friday, in the latest food safety scare to hit the country. The eggs, being referred to in Chinese media and on the internet as "rubber eggs" or "ping pong eggs," are too hard to eat, raising suspicion they are fake, after appearing in "small numbers" in markets nationwide, Xinhua news agency said. "The investigation is designed to appease consumers' concerns, after some suspected they bought artificial eggs made by unconscientious traders seeking profits," it reported. However, the eggs' hardness could be a natural occurrence, caused by hens consuming large amounts of food enriched with a compound called gossypol, which binds to protein in egg yolks, Xinhua said. "While gossypol normally exists in the residue of cotton seeds added to chicken feed as an extra protein source, large doses of the compound will suppress sperm activity as gossypol has been tested to be used in male contraceptive pills," it added.

[Reuters](#)

Norovirus infections associated with frozen raw oysters — Washington, 2011

17 February - On October 19, 2011, Public Health – Seattle & King County was contacted regarding a woman who had experienced acute gastroenteritis after dining at a local restaurant with friends. Staff members interviewed the diners and confirmed that three of the seven in the party had consumed a raw oyster dish. Within 18–36 hours after consumption, the three had onsets of aches, nausea, and nonbloody diarrhea lasting 24–48 hours. One ill diner also reported vomiting. The four diners who had not eaten the raw oysters did not become ill... The frozen oysters implicated in this outbreak were distributed internationally and had a 2-year shelf-life. Contamination of similar products has been implicated previously in international norovirus transmissions. Such contamination has potential for exposing persons widely dispersed in space and time, making cases difficult to identify or link through traditional complaint-based surveillance. To facilitate investigation of foodborne norovirus outbreaks, CDC recently implemented CaliciNet, the national electronic norovirus outbreak surveillance network. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

India's sour food safety record



13 February - Bhim can't understand what he's done wrong. Before dawn every day he joins hundreds of wholesale traders at Delhi's Azadpur Mandi, a sprawling, chaotic market where trucks blare Bollywood music, porters haul huge brown sacks of fruit and vegetables and hawkers ply tea and cigarettes. His own trade is in rosy red apples, laced with calcium carbide. Bhim says he's been adding chemicals to his apples for years to artificially ripen them after a long journey from the Himalayan foothills, despite being told that it causes cancer. As far as he knows, no-one has

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.

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ever died from eating his produce. So he can't understand why the authorities are pestering him now, and why he has to pay so many bribes to keep his business afloat...An interview with a senior food safety official starkly illustrates just how far India has to go to enforce the regulations properly. Although the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has banned the use of calcium carbide as it is carcinogenic, the senior official to whom Reuters spoke said "it is not harmful." "Unofficially, it happens everywhere," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "How can the ripe fruit be brought from far away areas?" During the interview, the official also had to check with someone on the phone whether calcium carbide was legal or not. Such attitudes explain why India still struggles to make its food fit for consumption. From rat poison found in vegetables and Diwali-festival sweets laced with caustic soda, to batches of moonshine liquor that kill scores of people at a time -- adulteration is rife. [Reuters](#)

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WELLNESS

Cannabis use doubles chances of vehicle crash, review finds



10 February - Drivers who consume cannabis within three hours of driving are nearly twice as likely to cause a vehicle collision as those who are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol, claims a paper published recently on the *British Medical Journal* website. The paper's authors, from Dalhousie University, reviewed nine studies with a total sample of 49,411 people to determine whether the consumption of cannabis increases the risk of a motor vehicle collision. This is the first review to look at various observational studies concerned with the risk of vehicle collision after the consumption of cannabis. Previous studies have failed to separate the effects of alcohol and other substances from the use of cannabis, resulting in a lack of agreement. [Science Daily](#)

Do smoking bans make people smoke less at home? Probably

16 February - A study of four European countries with smoke free legislation, published online in *Tobacco Control*, revealed that smoking bans do not encourage smokers to smoke more at home. According to the researchers, who base their findings on two waves of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC Project) Europe Surveys, smoking bans may actually encourage smokers to smoke less at home... The researchers found that after the ban came into place, the number of smokers who quit smoking at home increased considerably among all countries by the time of the second survey... Smokers were more likely to ban smoking at home if they supported smoking bans in bars, planned to quit the habit, or when there was a birth of a child. [Medical News Today](#)

Got a sinus infection? Antibiotics probably won't help

14 February - If you've ever had a painful sinus infection, all you want is relief — fast! So off to the doctor you go, and, as often as not, you get a prescription for an antibiotic. Three days later, you start to feel a little better. "Thank goodness for amoxicillin!" you might say. Well, probably not quite like that, unless you're a nerdy health blogger, but you'd be saying something nice about getting a prescription from your doctor. Well, it turns out you might have been just as happy getting nothing but advice to take a little acetaminophen for the pain, some over-the-counter cough medicine, a decongestant and regular spritzes of saline up your nose. [NPR](#)

How 1-minute intervals can improve your health



15 February - While many of us wonder just how much exercise we really need in order to gain health and fitness, a group of scientists in Canada are turning that issue on its head and asking, how little exercise do we need? The emerging and engaging answer appears to be, a lot less than most of us think — provided we're willing to work a bit. In proof of that idea, researchers at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, recently gathered several groups of volunteers. One consisted of sedentary but generally healthy middle-aged men and women. Another was composed of middle-aged and older patients who'd been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease. Despite the small time commitment of this modified HIIT program, after several weeks of practicing it, both the unfit volunteers and the cardiac patients showed significant improvements in their health and fitness. The results, [published in a recent review of HIIT-related research](#), were especially remarkable in the cardiac patients. [New York Times](#)

Is adding fiber to food really good for your health?

13 February - ...So are these fiber-fortified foods actually making you healthier? This question turns out to be one of those places where scientists know a lot less than you may think they do. For example, a lot of people think that fiber will help protect you against colon cancer. But so far, that link is not conclusive. There is a stronger connection between fiber and cardiovascular disease, Swartzberg says. Basically, people who eat lots of fruits, vegetables and legumes have lower rates of heart disease. But no one knows exactly *why* fiber-rich foods appear to prevent heart disease. Is it the fiber? Or is it something else in those foods? Maybe it's a combination of things. Maybe there is no single, magic bullet. Now, some food scientists are less critical of these fiber additives. They say many Americans are always going to choose junk food over fruits and vegetables. So you might as well put some fiber in there, even if we don't really know how much of a benefit it's having. But pretty much everyone agrees that given a choice between fiber-fortified sugar cereal and an apple, you're better off with the apple. "I don't want people to think that by adding things to unhealthy foods, it somehow makes them healthy," Swartzberg says. "And I think that's the most important message." [NPR](#)

The therapist may see you anytime, anywhere



13 February - The very idea of psychotherapy seems to defy the instant-access, video screen chatter of popular digital culture. Not for long, if some scientists have their way. In the past few years researchers have been testing simple video-game-like programs aimed at relieving common problems like anxiety and

depression. These recent results have been encouraging enough that investigators are now delivering the programs on smartphones — therapy apps, in effect, that may soon make psychological help accessible anytime, anywhere, whether in the grocery store line, on the bus or just before a work presentation. The prospect of a therapy icon next to Angry Birds and Fruit Ninja is stirring as much dread as hope in some quarters. “We are built as human beings to figure out our place in the world, to construct a narrative in the context of a relationship that gives meaning to our lives,” said Dr. Andrew J. Gerber, a psychiatrist at Columbia University. “I would be wary of treatments that don’t allow for that.” [New York Times](#)

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USAFRICOM

Africa: Highest-ever levels of multi-drug-resistant TB revealed

9 February - Hot on the heels of a major study showing malaria deaths are twice what everybody thought comes a WHO study showing the highest levels yet of drug-resistant TB. Following the dramatic new figures on malaria deaths from the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in Seattle, which I wrote about here and here, we now have new figures for multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, published in the Bulletin of the World Health Organisation. It shows the highest-ever recorded levels of MDR-TB. In some countries, 65% of patients who have previously been treated for TB end up back in hospital with a drug-resistant strain. The clear message is that their TB was not sufficiently well treated the first time around. It has to be said that it is all too easy for this to happen, when each patient has to take a six-month course of treatment. New, shorter-course drugs are urgently needed. This study ought to give further impetus to the drive to find them. TB is an area that I know the IHME will be addressing before long, as part of its project, which has taken five years of work so far, to get the best possible handle on global mortality rates from all causes. [All Africa](#)

Malawi: Cholera in a time of floods

9 February - They survived floods and witnessed the horrific scenes of their houses, livestock, household items and gardens being swept away at the end of January. Now, the

people of the Nsanje and Chikhwawa districts on Malawi's southern border with Mozambique are facing another menace; a cholera outbreak, which has already killed one child and infected up to 103 people. Government officials have attributed the outbreak to the declining sanitation conditions compounded by the floods; up to 550 pit latrines were washed away in Nsanje alone; a district hardest hit by the floods. Sewage from the latrines has contaminated water sources in the district including boreholes and dug-out wells thereby escalating the cholera incidents, according to the assistant Disaster Management Officer for Nsanje, Humphrey Magalasi. "Almost every household in the rural parts of the district only uses a pit latrine. Everything that was in the latrines in the flooded areas has gone into the water sources," Magalasi told IPS. Boreholes, dug-out wells, rivers and streams are the main water-sources in the rural parts of Malawi and people use them for all household chores. There are no taps in many villages. Lucy Mateyu, 46, a single mother of seven children from Mulolo village in Nsanje, told IPS that the floods hit her village as she was preparing lunch for her family on Jan. 23, 2012. [All Africa](#)

South Sudan's vicious mental health cycle

9 February - For many in South Sudan, mental illness is a disease attributed to witchcraft, with the mentally ill often ostracised and regarded as wild and a danger to society. As a result, communities often view mentally challenged people as misfits with families neglecting them and sometimes even abandoning them... While thinking they have found refuge in the streets, they are, however, rounded up and thrown in jails, where they are said to be in safer accommodation. But while jail remains one of the so-called secure places for the mentally challenged, a South Sudan prisoners' rights organisation says inmates at Juba central prison live in appalling conditions in cells not fit to harbour human beings.... Mental health professionals in the country claim that although there was a high level of post traumatic stress disorder after years of civil war, South Sudan lacks mental health legislation.

[The Africa Report](#)

Zimbabwe: Harare grapples with typhoid

15 February - Efforts continue in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, to end ongoing outbreaks of typhoid. The central government has mounted an anti-typhoid information campaign in a bid to halt the spread of the disease, while Harare officials have concentrated on stopping the sale of foods by vendors that they say could transmit the typhoid bacteria. Harare city officials have taken satisfaction in the reduced number of daily new cases of typhoid being reported in the capital - but residents remain displeased with the severe shortages of clean running water that they must continue to endure. Efforts to rid Harare of the typhoid outbreak have been going on for weeks now but the council is failing to rid the city of uncollected garbage. Nor has it been able to repair burst sewer pipes that are believed to be aiding the spread of the disease. [Voice of America](#)

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Afghanistan: UN chief notes losing fight against Afghan drugs

16 February - The U.N. secretary general on Thursday urged the international community to step up efforts to eradicate drugs in Afghanistan, noting that opium production there has grown by 61 percent in the past year and adding that "time is not on our side." In his opening statement to a meeting of top global representatives, Ban Ki-moon also warned that the problem extends beyond those who abuse drugs and is threatening Afghanistan itself. "Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime undermine the health of fragile states, (and) weaken the rule of law," he told delegates. "Above all, the Afghan government must prioritize the issue of narcotics." [Fox News](#)

Egypt: Where emergency crews need rescuing



14 February - In Egypt's political turmoil, one segment of society has been largely forgotten: the first aid responders who risk their lives to rescue victims of violence. Ambulance drivers and paramedics say they do not have adequate protection, insurance or job security, despite facing increased risk and

hostility in the year since a popular uprising toppled former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. "We have been more prone to violence and aggression after the revolution," Ahmed Mohamed, a 34-year-old first aid responder who works with the Ministry of Health, told IRIN. "It is becoming common for us now to be attacked, injured or even killed." [IRIN](#)

Pakistan: Independent, efficient Drug Regulatory Authority demanded

16 February - The country needs an independent and effective Drug Regulatory Authority (DRA) run by professionals at the federal level to ensure that medicines made in Pakistan meet the international standards, the Pharma Bureau said on Wednesday. Pharma Bureau, a representative body of multinational pharmaceutical companies, proposed that the DRA should have a strong provincial monitoring set up to ensure integrity of the pharmaceuticals manufacturers and the medicines... "We are also proposing that the DRA regulates not just medicines but alternative medicines, homeopathic and all other imported medicines on which there is currently no control in the country," Dr Sadia Moazam, Executive Director, Pharma Bureau said. [The News International](#)

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Europe cold has killed over 650



16 February - More than 650 people have died during a record-breaking cold snap in Eastern Europe, authorities said Wednesday, as officials in the Czech Republic blamed two huge car crashes on blinding snow. Since the end of January, the region has been pummeled by the deep freeze, which has brought the heaviest blizzards in recent memory. Tens of thousands have been trapped in often-freezing homes and villages by walls of snow and unpassable roads, and officials have struggled to reach the vulnerable with emergency food airlifts. Authorities in Russia and Ukraine reported Wednesday that more than 300 people have died in the bitter cold... In hard-hit Romania, about 23,000 people remain isolated in 225 eastern communities where more than one week of heavy snow has blocked roads and wreaked havoc on the rail network. Residents were worried that their houses could collapse under the heavy snow as authorities struggled to bring them food, water, medicine, and wood. [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

Italian court convicts 2 in asbestos-linked deaths

13 February - An Italian court Monday convicted two men of negligence in some 2,000 asbestos-related deaths blamed on contamination from a construction company, sentencing each of them to 16 years in prison and ordering them to pay millions in what officials called a historic case. Italian Health Minister Renato Balduzzi hailed the verdict by the three-judge Turin court as "without exaggeration, truly historic," noting that it came after a long battle for justice. "It's a great day, but that doesn't mean the battle against asbestos is over," he told Sky TG24 TV, stressing that it is a worldwide problem. Prosecutors said Jean-Louis de Cartier of Belgium and Stephan Schmidheiny of Switzerland, both key shareholders in the Swiss construction firm Eternit, failed to stop asbestos fibers left over from production of roof coverings and pipes at its northern Italian factories from spreading across the region. During the trial, which has stretched on since December 2009, some 2,100 deaths or illnesses were blamed on the asbestos fibers, which can cause grave lung problems, including cancer. Prosecutors said the contamination stretched over decades. [Miami Herald](#)

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U.S., California: L.A. air pollution may increase risk of stroke

15 February - L.A.'s smog problem might not be as visible as it was in the bad old days of the 1970s and '80s, but city residents might be at an increased risk of stroke even at levels of pollution that meet EPA standards. Oh yeah, and memory loss. A new study published Monday in the Archives of Internal Medicine found that Boston residents experienced more strokes when exposed to "moderate" amounts of particulate air pollution, as opposed to "good" amounts of pollution, according to EPA standards. The types of pollution monitored included those specifically linked with car traffic. Reviewing the medical records of about 1,700 stroke victims at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, the study's authors found that the risk of stroke was 34% higher on days of "moderate" exposure than it was on "good" days. The effects were most acute in the first 12 to 14 hours after exposure. "The main message is that, at levels that are below the current EPA standards that are considered safe, we were seeing a rather large increase in risk of stroke in association with particulate air pollution," said George Wellenius, an assistant professor of Epidemiology at Brown University and lead author of the study. [Los Angeles Times](#)

U.S.: Critical shortage of children's leukemia drug

10 February - Medication used to treat the most common form of childhood leukemia is in short supply, adding to the largest nationwide shortage of critical lifesaving hospital medications in nearly a decade. All five pharmaceutical companies that make the injection drug methotrexate, which treats acute lymphoblastic leukemia by slowing the growth of cancer cells, have either slowed and stopped manufacturing of the drug, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The companies have cited high demand or manufacturing delays as reasons for the shortage. If the shortage continues, physicians and pharmacists fear thousands of children will be left without lifesaving treatment. "This, to us in oncology, is a national crisis," said Brooke Bernhardt, clinical pharmacy specialist in the department of hematology and oncology at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston. [ABC News](#)

U.S.: FDA warns of counterfeit cancer drug

15 February - A counterfeit version of the anti-cancer drug Avastin may have been purchased and used in a number of medical facilities in the United States, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warned Wednesday. The FDA sent letters to 19 medical practices known to have purchased unapproved cancer medications, according to the agency. The counterfeit version of Avastin lacks the medicine's key ingredient, bevacizumab. Roche, the pharmaceutical company that manufactures Avastin, conducted laboratory tests confirming the presence of the counterfeit version, the FDA noted. "The counterfeit product is not safe or effective and should not be used," Roche member company Genentech said in a written statement. Genentech is responsible for marketing Avastin. The unapproved cancer medications -- potentially including the counterfeit version of Avastin -- were purchased

from a foreign supplier known as Quality Specialty Products, which may also be known as Montana Health Care Solutions, according to the FDA. [CNN](#)

U.S., Indiana: Health department confirms 13 measles cases

14 February - The Indiana State Department of Health has confirmed three more cases of measles, bringing the total to 13 cases across the state. Health officials say the cases are still confined to Hamilton and Boone counties north of Indianapolis. But the list of places for potential exposure has grown to include churches, schools and grocery stores. On Tuesday, Noblesville school officials notified parents a middle school student had a suspected case. Two of the confirmed measles cases visited Super Bowl Village on Feb. 3. The state health department and Centers for Disease Control say nobody has yet reported measles after being exposed there. Measles starts with cough-like symptoms and escalates with a high fever and full-body rash. Individuals born before 1957 and those who have received the vaccine are considered immune. [The Wall Street Journal](#)

U.S.: Report urges EPA to abandon proposed air pollution rule

15 February - A group of conservation groups say the long-term health of national parks and other wild areas across the eastern United States, and of the communities that depend on them, could be in jeopardy if the Environmental Protection Agency exempts some of the oldest and highest polluting coal-fired power plants from installing the Best Available Retrofit Technology, known as BART. A coalition of national, regional and state groups released a report last week that they say shows how EPA's proposed BART rule exemption will deprive parks and communities of the protections they need to achieve the cleanest possible air. [International Falls Journal](#)

U.S.: White House sticking to contraception plan

12 February - President Barack Obama will not make any more changes to the rule announced last week requiring health insurance plans to provide women with coverage for contraception, although U.S. Roman Catholic bishops have said it violates the Church's religious principles. "We put out the plan that reflects where the president intended to go. This is our plan," White House chief of staff Jacob Lew said on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday. Lew said no religious organization will be required to pay for or facilitate the coverage that it disagrees with since the insurance companies are the ones who will pay. Asked what incentive insurance companies would have to provide contraception, Lew - Obama's budget director until last month - said it would be cost effective just like other preventive healthcare coverage. [Reuters](#)

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Australia: Syphilis

15 February - Mount Isa's booming illegal prostitution trade has been blamed for an outbreak of syphilis in the north western mining town. The state government on Sunday [12 Feb 2012] launched an education campaign in north west communities to raise awareness about the curable sexually transmissible infection and encourage residents to have regular testing. A total of 5 cases of syphilis have been reported in the Mount Isa Health Service District already this year. There were 16 cases in the region in 2010 and more than 80 cases in 2011. [ProMED-mail](#)

Bangladesh: Outbreak of deadly Nipah virus



13 February - An outbreak of the Nipah virus in northern Bangladesh has killed 30 people since the start of 2011, prompting national health warnings against the fatal pathogen spread by fruit bats. Everyone who got infected, died. "Only by stopping the consumption of the raw sap, can this disease be stopped. Despite our many attempts at raising awareness, people are ignoring the warnings and as a result, are getting infected," warned Health Minister A.F.M. Ruhul Haque. Palm tree sap, often served fresh, is a popular drink in rural areas. Six people from the northern Joypurhat District have died thus far in 2012 and 24 during the same period in 2011. "In the last two years, the mortality rate has been 100 percent. Once the disease sets in, nothing much can be done," Mahmudur Rahman, director of the non-governmental Dhaka-based Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told IRIN. [IRIN](#)

Fiji: One dead as typhoid and dengue confirmed in flood aftermath

17 February - A Fiji woman has died of dengue fever following last month's severe flooding in the Western Division. The regional commissioner Joeli Cawaki says the woman died of intestinal haemorrhage and an autopsy established the cause. The Fiji Times reports the woman as having died on Sunday, after the Lautoka Hospital failed to admit her four days earlier. The Health Ministry says there are now 23 cases of dengue fever, 16 cases of leptospirosis and 14 cases of typhoid recorded during the post-flood period in the Western Division. [Solomon Star](#)

UN calls for acceleration of HIV treatment in Asia-Pacific Nations

6 February - The United Nations is praising Asia Pacific countries for their response to the HIV/Aids epidemic, but says there are still legal and social barriers that significantly set back eradication efforts. Monday, The U.N. Economic and Social Commission for the Asia Pacific opened a three-day meeting lauding impressive gains in recent years in the fight against

HIV/AIDS. Noeleen Heyzer, the executive secretary of U.N. ESCAP, told officials and activists from 34 Asia Pacific countries that more people than ever had access to HIV treatment. She says new HIV infections are down 20 percent since 2001 and she is expecting to meet a goal to begin to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. "Countries such as Cambodia, India, Myanmar and Thailand have successfully reduced their HIV infection rates with intensive, wide-reaching preventive programs, particularly among people who buy and sell sex," Heyzer said. However, Heyzer notes the gains are uneven and there are still gaps in the goal of universal access to HIV treatment. She says the HIV epidemic is outpacing the response. "There are still almost two new infections for every person who starts treatment. These new infections remain concentrated among key population of higher risk: People who buy and sell sex, people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men and trans-gender people," Heyzer stated. [Voice of America](#)

Western Pacific Region: Leprosy, WHO

15 February - As per recent reports, it has been revealed that 500[0] new leprosy cases have been detected in the Western Pacific [Region], the place where the disease was said to be eradicated since 1991. This news has raised concerns within the World Health Organization (WHO), which has asked the government[s] to take stern action. WHO said that they [presumably the governments. - Mod.SH] have done not much to eradicate the disease completely, [the consequences] of which [are] in front of them. They have called for an investigation, which aims to know the condition of disease across different countries as well. WHO regional director Shin Young-soo said that they have come to know that the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Kiribati are among 37 countries that have not taken precautionary steps to lower the leprosy cases. [ProMED-mail](#)

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Chile: Hantavirus public alert after outbreak kills three people, infects ten others

9 February - Health Minister Jaime Manalich said wildfires in the southern Bio Bio and Araucania regions have driven rats from their normal habitat into places where people live. In an interview with Chile's Radio Cooperativa, he said that he fears this may be just the leading edge of a much wider problem. The outbreak began in the El Manzano prison, where two inmates died and 10 others were under observation. Authorities learned on Sunday that two prison workers now have symptoms, and a person camping outside Concepcion died of the virus. [Merco Press](#)

Oil spill fouls river in eastern Venezuela

11 February - Crude oil that spilled from a ruptured pipeline has blackened a river in eastern Venezuela, and the state oil company said workers are containing the spill. Workers have

removed a "good percentage of the crude" from the Guarapiche River in Monagas state, said Ramiro Ramirez, environmental director of state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA. Ramirez told the state-run Venezuelan News Agency on Friday that workers have been using absorbent barriers to block the crude in the river. He said they have also shut off water intakes along the river, where a drinking water purification plant is located. State oil company officials said a pipe that transports crude to a processing plant ruptured on Feb. 4. Ramirez didn't say how much crude has spilled. He said officials were investigating what caused the accident. Gov. Jose Gregorio Briceno said earlier in the week that the government had declared an emergency in Monagas state after the spill forced officials to halt normal water distribution to parts of the city of Maturin, the Venezuela television station Globovision reported. Briceno said classes have been canceled at schools in affected areas, and public offices have reduced hours due to the water supply problems. [Official Wire](#)

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