

18 January 2013

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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Do I Need a Flu Shot if I've Had the Flu?

Unless a doctor took a nasal swab, you can't be sure that what you had was flu — and unless it was sent on to a top state laboratory or to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lab for sequencing (which is not routine), even your doctor wouldn't be able to say for sure exactly which flu virus it was.

Second, even if you had the flu, you presumably had only one strain, which you now have antibodies against. There are at least four strains circulating this year: H3N2, H1N1, and two different B strains. The flu shot contains vaccines against three of them (it only has one of the B's). By next year, some flu shots will have four vaccines. So a shot would still offer protection against flus you have not had. **New York Times**



WELLNESS

- Brazilian bikini waxes make crab lice endangered species
- Coughs often last longer than patients expect
- Drug overdoses top AIDS as main cause of homeless deaths
- ER visits tied to energy drinks double since 2007
- FDA to require lower recommended dosages for sleep drugs
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- Pakistan also has a rape problem
- Syria: Rape has become 'significant' part of Syrian war, says humanitarian group

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- France will ask EU to curb use of newer birth control pills
- Germany: Mass donor organ fraud shakes Germany

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- Canada: More kids taking alternative therapies, but doctors rarely told: study
- U.S.: Buffalo VA hospital investigates possible HIV and hepatitis exposure
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- Bangladesh bats harbouring deadly Ebola variant
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- Cuba: Cholera in the time of modern medicine

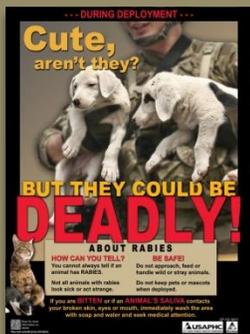
U.S. MILITARY

'71 Pentagon paper says Agent Orange was stored on Kadena Air Base

12 January - A single sentence buried among 7,000 pages of documents recently released by the Pentagon might well be the needle in the haystack that conclusively proves the U.S. military stored toxic herbicides, including Agent Orange, in Okinawa during the Vietnam War. American veterans have long claimed that large volumes of these chemicals were

**USAPHC Rabies
Prevention
Outreach Program:
Information for
Providers**

The USAPHC Rabies Prevention Outreach Program has updated their website to include new information on monkey bite responses, NCMI risk information and more.



present on Okinawa Island and hundreds of them are suffering serious illnesses they believe were triggered by their exposure. But the U.S. government has repeatedly denied the allegations by insisting it has no records related to the issue. The latest discovery in a 1971 report titled "Historical, logistical, political and technical aspects of the herbicide/defoliant program" indicates the Pentagon's denials might not have been entirely correct. [Japan Times](#)

2012 Military suicides hit a record high of 349

14 January — Suicides in the U.S. military surged to a record 349 last year, far exceeding American combat deaths in Afghanistan, and some private experts are predicting the dark trend will grow worse this year. The Pentagon has struggled to deal with the suicides, which Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and others have called an epidemic. The problem reflects severe strains on military personnel burdened with more than a decade of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, complicated by anxiety over the prospect of being forced out of a shrinking force. ...Last year's total is the highest since the Pentagon began closely tracking suicides in 2001. It exceeds the 295 Americans who died in Afghanistan last year, by the AP's count. [NPR](#)

Pulmonary and extrapulmonary coccidioidomycosis, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 1999-2011

December - Coccidioidomycosis is an infection caused by inhalation of *Coccidioides* species of fungi, which grow in the soil of the southwestern United States. Many thousands of military service members are assigned to, or perform training in, the endemic region. During the 13 years 1999 through 2011, 483 active component service members were diagnosed with coccidioidomycosis (rate: 2.69 cases per 100,000 person-years). Twelve percent of all diagnoses specified extrapulmonary infection, indicating dissemination to other organ systems (e.g., skin, skeleton, or central nervous system). Service members of Asian/Pacific Islander race had markedly higher incidence rates of coccidioidomycosis, particularly extrapulmonary disease, compared to members of other racial/ethnic groups. Crude incidence rates of coccidioidomycosis in service members older than 40 and males were higher than the rates of their respective counterparts. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Udall-Corker burn pit registry signed into law

11 January - U.S. Sens. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) announced that President Obama signed their bill to establish a registry of service members and veterans who were exposed to toxic chemicals and fumes from open-air burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan into law... The bill will create a registry similar to the Agent Orange and Gulf War registries to help patients, doctors and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) determine to what extent air pollution caused by open air burn pits has led to medical diseases among service members. [Political News](#)

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Go Viral to Improve Health 2013

The Institute of Medicine and the National Academy of Engineering invites college and university students to participate in the **Third Annual Go Viral to Improve Health: IOM-NAE Health Data Collegiate Challenge**.

Teams of students will have an opportunity to utilize the abundance of available health data to develop effective, innovative, new applications that take on the nation's pressing health issues. \$18,000 in prize money will be awarded to the Challenge winners. Teams can register between now and February 27, 2013.

Past Winners Register



GLOBAL

Black carbon twice as dangerous as 2007 estimate, scientists say

15 January - The black carbon produced by diesel engines is nearly twice as damaging to the planet as estimated in 2007 and trails only carbon dioxide as the most dangerous climate pollutant, according to an article published online today in the Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres. The four-year study by more than two dozen researchers also showed that black carbon causes "significantly higher warming" over the Arctic and can affect rainfall patterns in high-emitting regions such as Asia. The pollutant also has contributed to rising temperatures in mid- to high-latitude areas including the U.S. and Canada. "The potential to slow warming by cutting black carbon is even more important than previously understood," Durwood Zaelke, president of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development, said today in a statement discussing the study. "It also kills over a million people every year who contract deadly respiratory diseases."

[Bloomberg](#)

Dengue is fastest-spreading tropical disease, WHO says

16 January - Dengue is the world's fastest-spreading tropical disease and represents a "pandemic threat", infecting an estimated 50 million people across all continents, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday. Transmitted by the bite of female mosquitoes, the disease is occurring more widely due to increased movement of people and goods - including carrier objects such as bamboo plants and used tires - as well as floods linked to climate change, the United Nations agency said. The viral disease, which affected only a handful of areas in the 1950s, is now present in more than 125 countries - significantly more than malaria, historically the most notorious mosquito-borne disease. The most advanced vaccine against dengue is only 30 percent effective, trials last year showed.

[Reuters](#)

Feces transplant may help relieve severe diarrhea

16 January - It may sound like the most unappealing treatment available, but a small new study has concluded that inserting fecal material from a healthy person into the gut of someone with severe diarrhea may cure their problem more effectively than antibiotics. The study, which appears in the New England Journal of Medicine, involved patients who had repeated bouts of diarrhea caused by a bacterium known as *Clostridium difficile*. So-called C. diff can take over the intestines after antibiotic treatment has killed off the beneficial bacteria found in the gut. One transplant of fecal material from a volunteer - with its mix of healthy bacteria - resolved severe diarrhea in 13 out of 16 volunteers. Standard treatment with an antibiotic, in comparison, worked in four of 13 patients. [Reuters](#)

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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Global control and regional elimination of measles, 2000–2011

18 January - Widespread use of measles vaccine since 1980 has led to a substantial decline in global measles morbidity and mortality; measles elimination* has been achieved and sustained in the World Health Organization (WHO) Region of the Americas (AMR) since 2002... Estimated global [measles-containing vaccine (MCV1)] coverage increased from 72% in 2000 to 84% in 2011, and the number of countries providing a second dose of measles-containing vaccine (MCV2) through routine services increased from 97 (50%) in 2000 to 141 (73%) in 2011. During 2000–2011, annual reported measles incidence decreased 65%, from 146 to 52 cases per 1 million population, and estimated measles deaths decreased 71%, from 542,000 to 158,000. However, during 2010–2011, measles incidence increased, and large outbreaks of measles were reported in multiple countries. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

- In Week 2 (through 12 January 2013), the percents of all outpatient visits due to Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) and Pneumonia & Influenza (P&I) have decreased across all regions except for outpatient visits due to ILI among Service Members in the EUCOM and PACOM regions. Higher incidence rates of ILI and P&I were observed since Week 47 among unvaccinated Service Members compared to vaccinated Service Members in the U.S.
- Across the overseas DoD laboratory surveillance network, influenza activity is at moderate levels with slightly increased influenza activity in Europe compared to last week; sites reported variable co-circulation of influenza A/H1, A/H3, and B.
- The influenza vaccination coverage for the DoD (Active Duty component only) is 95%. Additional info regarding the seasonal influenza in the general U.S. and DoD populations can be found on the AFHSC homepage. [AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

Boosting your flu shot response with exercise

16 January – [R]esearchers at Iowa State University in Ames recently had young, healthy volunteers, most of them college students, head out for a moderately paced 90-minute jog or bike ride 15 minutes after receiving their flu shot. Other volunteers sat quietly for 90

minutes after their shot. Then the researchers checked for blood levels of influenza antibodies a month later. Those volunteers who had exercised after being inoculated, it turned out, exhibited “nearly double the antibody response” of the sedentary group, said Marian Kohut, a professor of kinesiology at Iowa State who oversaw the study, which is being prepared for publication. They also had higher blood levels of certain immune system cells that help the body fight off infection. [New York Times](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 1 (December 30-January 5), influenza activity remained elevated in the U.S., but may be decreasing in some areas.

- **Viral Surveillance:** Of 12,876 specimens tested, 4,222 (32.8%) were positive for influenza.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was slightly above the epidemic threshold.
- **Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths:** Two influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported.
- **Outpatient Illness Surveillance:** The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 4.3%; above the national baseline of 2.2%. **Geographic Spread of Influenza:** Forty-seven states reported widespread geographic influenza activity.

[FluView](#)

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During Week 1, 59 specimens were tested from 19 locations. There were 23 influenza A viruses (22 influenza A(H3) and one A/not subtyped) and three influenza B viruses detected. Decreased submissions were observed compared with prior weeks.
- To date, 1,253 specimens have been tested from 62 locations of which 385 were positive for influenza A (369 A/H3, 13 A(H1N1)pdm09, two co-infections of A/H3 & B, and one A/not subtyped); and 53 were positive for influenza B (14 B/Yamagata, two B/Victoria, and 37 B/lineage undetermined). There have been 97 other respiratory viruses isolated (28 adenovirus, 17 RSV, eight enterovirus, and 44 parainfluenza).
- The vaccine appears to be well matched with currently circulating strains. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

Early estimates of seasonal influenza vaccine effectiveness — United States, January 2013

18 January - Each season since 2004–05, CDC has estimated the effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine to prevent influenza-associated, medically attended acute respiratory infection (ARI). This season, early data from 1,155 children and adults with ARI enrolled during December 3, 2012–January 2, 2013 were used to estimate the overall effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine for preventing laboratory-confirmed influenza virus infection associated with medically attended ARI. After adjustment for study site, but not for other

factors, the estimated vaccine effectiveness (VE) was 62% (95% confidence intervals [CIs] = 51%–71%). This interim estimate indicates moderate effectiveness, and is similar to a summary VE estimate from a meta-analysis of randomized controlled clinical trial data; final estimates likely will differ slightly. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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

In week 1/2013, 26 countries reported clinical information:

- Increasing trends were reported by 16 countries compared to only nine of 20 countries in week 52. Only Romania reported decreasing trends.
- Twelve countries reported medium- or high-intensity transmission. The geographic pattern of influenza activity was reported as widespread by ten countries, representing an increase in proportions over week 52. Countries in northern and western Europe were most affected.
- Of 734 sentinel specimens tested across 20 countries, 320 (44%) were positive for influenza virus – a high percentage but similar to that seen in week 52.
- A total of 167 hospitalised, laboratory-confirmed influenza cases reported by four countries.
- No overall excess of all-cause deaths has appeared as yet this season to date but individual deaths are being reported.

Influenza activity and disease increased substantially in a number of EU/EEA countries in week 1/2012, especially in north-western Europe. The virological pattern being identified in the EU/EEA is different from that being reported so far from North America. [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

Google.org: Flu Trends

17 January – Estimates of flu activity based on certain Internet search queries indicate that the level of flu activity in the northern hemisphere ranges from minimal in Bulgaria to intense in the United States and in the southern hemisphere ranges from minimal to low.

[Google.org Flu Trends](#)

In flu season, use a mask. But which one?

16 January - ...The key idea here is exposure, Dr. Septimus said. If you are a caregiver and intimately exposed to someone who is coughing, sneezing and has the flu, wearing a mask probably makes sense — as it does if you are the person with the flu doing the coughing and sneezing and a caregiver is nearby. But the scientific evidence about how influenza is transmitted is not as strong as experts would like, said Dr. Carolyn Bridges, associate director of adult immunization at the C.D.C. It is generally accepted that the flu virus is transmitted through direct contact — when someone who is ill touches his or her nose and then a glass that he or she hands to someone else, for instance — and through large droplets that go flying through the air when a person coughs or sneezes. What is not known is the extent to which tiny aerosol particles are implicated in transmission. Evidence

suggests that these tiny particles may play a more important part than previously suspected. [New York Times](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 12 January 2013:

- Influenza: Three cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees.
- Adenovirus: Type 14 adenovirus cases continue at MCRD Parris Island, though FRI rates remain low
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated elevated FRI rates at Ft. Jackson, Ft. Leonard Wood, and CGTC Cape May. . [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

Rapidly produced flu vaccine wins F.D.A. approval

16 January - A new type of flu vaccine won regulatory approval on Wednesday, and its manufacturer said that limited supplies are expected to be available this winter. The vaccine, developed by a small company called Protein Sciences, is made with a process that does not require the virus to be grown in chicken eggs, as is now generally done. That means a vaccine could be ready weeks earlier in the event of a pandemic. [New York Times](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 5 January 2013 (Week 1)

- This appears to be an early influenza season in the US. Overall activity remains elevated, but declines were seen in some regions. CDC estimates 36% of people 6 months and older have been vaccinated. Vaccination is still the best prevention, and is available in MTFs.
- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 1 were 17% lower than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Six hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in week 1. A total of 36 hospitalized cases have been reported during this influenza season.
- Acute Respiratory Disease at BCT sites: ARD rates remain low at all Army BCT sites; despite high civilian rates in the southeast, no increased influenza activity has been noted in trainees.
- Viral specimens: During week 1, 355 of 1300 (27%) laboratory specimens tested were positive for respiratory pathogens. Most of the influenza positive specimens were from SRMC (66%), primarily Ft. Hood (34%). [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Flu vaccine not linked to fetal death

16 January - Getting the flu vaccine while pregnant does not increase the odds that the fetus will die in the womb, according to a new study of tens of thousands of women in Norway. Although fetal deaths were rare during the study, they were more common in pregnant women with the flu. "Vaccination itself was not associated with increased fetal mortality and may have reduced the risk of influenza-related death during the pandemic" of 2009, said the team, led by Dr. Siri Haberg of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health in Oslo. [Reuters](#)

H5N1 hits backyard flocks in Bhutan

14 January - An outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian flu in backyard free-ranging flocks in Bhutan has killed 18 poultry and led to 952 more being culled, according to a Jan 11 report to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). The birds had died from Dec 19 through Dec 30 in Dagana village in Dagana district, the report said. Trace-back investigations found that 10 more birds had died in the previous month but had not been reported, the report said. A national and a regional reference lab confirmed H5N1 in two samples collected from backyard flocks, whereupon the remaining 952 susceptible poultry were culled to prevent disease spread. The report said the outbreak investigation is ongoing. Bhutan reported eight H5N1 outbreaks in 2012, including its first ever last January. [CIDRAP](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

China: Chicken scare takes bite out of KFC's reputation

12 January - Yum Brands, the parent company of US fast-food chain KFC, is facing its worst crisis in two decades on the mainland. The company's vice-chairman apologised to Chinese consumers on Wednesday night after media reports that two of KFC's big suppliers fed chicken excessive amounts of antibiotics and hormones. The company was accused of failing to report the case to the government after discovering illegal drugs in the suppliers' chicken products... The Shanghai Food and Drug Administration said on December 20 that eight batches of chicken samples supplied to Yum by the Liuhe Group had overly high levels of antibiotics. An investigation is continuing. [South China Morning Post](#)

Danish outbreak involved rare E coli subtype, high HUS prevalence

11 January - In what the authors say is the first foodborne outbreak of highly virulent verocytotoxin-producing Escherichia coli (VTEC) O157:H7 in Denmark, researchers describe

13 cases, 8 of which involved hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), from a rare subtype. Writing in Eurosurveillance yesterday, the researchers said the 13 case-patients from the fall 2012 outbreak were from nine families, and a trace-back investigation revealed ground beef to be the likely source. Eleven patients had symptoms; the two asymptomatic cases were identified through testing of family members. [CIDRAP](#)

E coli antibiotic resistance in chickens depends on dosage

16 January - Administering antibiotics to chickens not only raises the level of antibiotic-resistant Escherichia coli in the birds' gastrointestinal tract, but a higher dosage produces a higher prevalence of resistant strains, Dutch researchers report in a Foodborne Pathogens and Disease study yesterday. The team administered a 2-day course of amoxicillin, oxytetracycline, or enrofloxacin added to the chickens' drinking water at either the full therapeutic dose, at 75% of that, or at the "carry-over" level of 2.5% (three groups of 15 chickens at each dose, plus a control group). The investigators then measured the minimal inhibitory concentration for the antibiotics in E coli strains isolated from cloacal swabs taken from the poultry during treatment and for 12 days afterward. The full dose yielded the highest percentage of resistant strains during and immediately after treatment.. After 12 days without antibiotics, only strains from chickens receiving amoxicillin were significantly more often resistant compared with controls. [CIDRAP](#)

United Kingdom: Beef contaminated with horse meat may have been sold in Britain for 'years'

16 January - The Food Standards Agency was criticised after admitting it had never carried out tests for horse meat on food sold in Britain. Seven of the leading supermarkets have cleared their shelves of frozen beefburgers after a supplier sold Tesco products which were 29 per cent horse meat. The supermarket took out newspaper advertisements to apologise to customers. The discovery was made by Irish authorities, leading to accusations that the Food Standards Agency in Britain had been taking a "light touch". [Telegraph](#)

U.S.: Nearly 80 percent of produce growers will be exempt from new food safety rule

11 January - According to produce industry experts, there are no real surprises in the lengthy proposed rule for produce safety, which has been widely hailed as a big step toward a preventive food safety system. For the most part, the proposal, which would for the first time mandate preventative practices across the industry, follows well known best practices and the best available science. What may surprise consumers, however, is that an estimated 79 percent of growers will be exempt from the rule once it's finalized. There are estimated to be 190,111 domestic farms that grow produce (including 475 that grow sprouts), according to an impact analysis study conducted by FDA. Of these farms, an estimated 149,561, or nearly 79 percent, will not be covered by the produce rule because they grow products that are rarely consumed raw, make under \$25,000 annually or qualify for a small farm exemption. [Food Safety News](#)

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WELLNESS

Brazilian bikini waxes make crab lice endangered species

13 January - Pubic lice, the crab-shaped insects that have dwelled in human groins since the beginning of history, are disappearing. Doctors say bikini waxing may be the reason. Waning infestations of the bloodsuckers have been linked by doctors to pubic depilation, especially a technique popularized in the 1990s by a Manhattan salon run by seven Brazilian sisters. More than 80 percent of college students in the U.S. remove all or some of their pubic hair -- part of a trend that's increasing in western countries. In Australia, Sydney's main sexual health clinic hasn't seen a woman with pubic lice since 2008 and male cases have fallen 80 percent from about 100 a decade ago. [Bloomberg](#)

Coughs often last longer than patients expect

15 January - People underestimate how long coughs from bronchitis last, a mismatch that could drive overprescription of antibiotics, a U.S. study suggests. The average acute cough lasts 17.8 days, Dr. Mark Ebell, an epidemiology professor at the University of Georgia, and his co-authors conclude in the January issue of the *Annals of Family Medicine* after reviewing the medical literature. The researchers looked at the results of 19 studies on patients in the U.S., Europe, Russia and Kenya on duration of cough and surveyed 493 adults in Georgia on how they expect acute coughs to last. Respondents gave an average duration of cough of 7.2 to 9.3 days. [CBC News](#)

Drug overdoses top AIDS as main cause of homeless deaths



14 January - Overdoses of drugs, particularly prescription painkillers and heroin, have overtaken AIDS to become the leading cause of death of homeless adults, according to a study of homeless residents of Boston released on Monday. The finding came from a five-year study of homeless adults who received treatment from the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program. But its broad conclusions apply to homeless populations in many urban parts of the United States, the study's author and homeless advocates said. [Reuters](#)

ER visits tied to energy drinks double since 2007

16 January - A new government survey suggests the number of people seeking emergency treatment after consuming energy drinks has doubled nationwide during the past four years, the same period in which the supercharged drink industry has surged in popularity in convenience stores, bars and on college campuses. From 2007 to 2011, the government estimates the number of emergency room visits involving the neon-labeled beverages shot up from about 10,000 to more than 20,000. Most of those cases involved teens or young

adults, according to a survey of the nation's hospitals released late last week by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration... The FDA said it was considering the findings and pressing for more details as it undertakes a broad review of the safety of energy drinks and related ingredients this spring. "We will examine this additional information ... as a part of our ongoing investigation into potential safety issues surrounding the use of energy-drink products," FDA spokeswoman Shelly Burgess said in a statement. [ABC News](#)

FDA to require lower recommended dosages for sleep drugs

10 January - The Food and Drug Administration said Thursday it will require manufacturers of popular sleep medications such as Ambien to scale back their recommended dosages for women, in light of new data showing some people remain impaired well into the next morning, even as they climb behind the wheel to head to work. The new edict will affect the labeling of drugs that contain zolpidem, a widely used ingredient in sleep aids. FDA officials settled on the new rules after driving simulations and laboratory studies showed that eight hours after taking the medication, as many as 15 percent of women and 3 percent of men still had enough of the drug in their systems to impair driving "to a degree that increases the risk of a motor vehicle accident." [Washington Post](#)

Police to use fake pill bottles to track drugstore thieves

15 January - The novel response to a deadly increase in pharmacy robberies and burglaries over the last half decade appears to draw its inspiration from a tactic banks use: handing over a bundle of bills loaded with an exploding dye pack that stains both the cash and the robber red. The decoy pill bottles appear to be sealed bottles of oxycodone, a powerful narcotic painkiller that is widely abused, according to remarks that the police commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly, made on Tuesday. The bottles will not actually contain any painkillers. Inside each bottle, however, will be a GPS device that will allow detectives to track thieves in the period immediately after a robbery or burglary. [New York Times](#)

Simple breath test finds TB, lung infections

11 January - Bacteria that cause lung infections like tuberculosis (TB) release volatile organic compounds that end up in exhaled breath. Now scientists have identified the unique "chemical fingerprints" given off by different bacteria in the lungs in a way that potentially allows for the diagnosis of such lung infections via a quick and simple breath test... The study was conducted on mice, but if it can be repeated in humans, then the hope is that a simple breath test could reduce the time taken to diagnose lung infections from days and weeks to minutes. [Medical News Today](#)

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Mauritania: Refugees face 'alarming' malnutrition, mortality rates

10 January - In Mbéra refugee camp in eastern Mauritania, home to 55,000 Malians, just under one child in five is malnourished, and 4.6 percent are severely malnourished - two to three times the national average, according to a just-released November survey by NGO Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). Children under five are dying mainly from a combination of malnutrition and malaria, respiratory infections and diarrhoea, according to MSF head in Mauritania Karl Nawezi, who describes the situation as "alarming and unacceptable". Only 70 percent of under-fives have been vaccinated against measles, causing concern about further deaths as the combination of measles and malnutrition is usually fatal. [All Africa](#)

Nigeria: HIV/AIDS - No cure for now for sure

14 January - Last week, the Dean of the School of Basic Medical Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Professor Isaiah Ibeh, claimed to have developed a possible cure for HIV/AIDS. He had claimed that his discovery, a herbal drug called bioclean II (DXL - Deconcoction X-Liquid), was capable of wiping out HIV or significantly lowering its load within a month. Following the uproar that greeted the announcement, the National AIDS Control Agency, NACA; the National Agency for Food & Drug Administration and Control, NAFDAC, as well as the UNIBEN authorities, distanced themselves from the claim. In a dramatic volte-face, Ibeh retracted the claim and tendered an apology to the University authorities. [All Africa](#)

Somaliland government works to contain measles outbreak

15 January - The Somaliland regional government announced a measles outbreak in the Marodi Jeh region on Sunday (January 13th). Fifty-two measles cases were documented last week, Director of Public Health in the Ministry of Health Ali Sheikh Omer said. Some of the infected patients have been admitted to Hargeisa General Hospital for treatment. "Eleven of them were transferred from regions outside Hargeisa, and the infected patients are of varying ages," Omer told Sabahi. [Sabahi](#)

Trouble brewing: Africa and alcohol problems

14 January - Alcohol consumption and its consequent effects on health are on the rise in Africa. Reports published by the World Health Organization (WHO) have recorded some concerning trends. Despite average alcohol consumption per capita being only half of Europe's (largely thanks to Africa's many teetotal Muslims and Christians), the latest WHO report found the region to have the highest rate of binge drinking in the world at 25%. "It's true that most people in Africa don't drink for cultural, religious and economic reasons", says Vladimir Poznyak, Coordinator of the Management of Substance Abuse unit at WHO, "but those who drink, drink a lot". [Think Africa Press](#)

Jordan: Winter storm batters Jordan, 8 reported dead

10 January - The fiercest winter storm to hit the Mideast in years brought a rare foot of snow to Jordan on Wednesday, caused fatal accidents in Lebanon and the West Bank, and disrupted traffic on the Suez Canal in Egypt. At least eight people died across the region. In Lebanon, the Red Cross said storm-related accidents killed six people over the past two days... The unusual weather over the past few days hit vulnerable Syrian refugees living in tent camps very hard, particularly some 50,000 sheltering in the Zaatari camp in Jordan's northern desert. Torrential rains over four days have flooded some 200 tents and forced women and infants to evacuate in temperatures that dipped below freezing at night, whipping wind and lashing rain. [The Review](#)

Pakistan also has a rape problem

11 January - Days after the Delhi gang-rape victim died, a 9-year-old girl in Pakistan was allegedly abducted from her home and raped by three men. The captors are said to have beat her before dropping her bleeding body in front of her house. One of the kidnappers is then reported to have threatened her mother, saying they would kill her if she contacted the police. She did anyway. The mother then took her daughter, a second-grader, to a nearby hospital where she was treated for a loss of blood and internal injuries. Police have arrested six suspects and a court case is pending. Few Pakistani media outlets carried this story and no demonstrations have been held in support of the young victim. Such a muted response is in stark contrast to the protests that are raging in India, demanding justice for the 23-year-old medical student who is alleged to have been raped and brutalized by six men on a moving bus in Delhi. [Global Post](#)

Syria: Rape has become 'significant' part of Syrian war, says humanitarian group

16 January - Rape has become a "significant and disturbing feature" of the war in Syria, one that many refugees cite as their leading reason for fleeing the country, according to a report released Monday by a New York-based humanitarian organization. The victims are primarily women and girls who are attacked in public, at roadblocks or at home by "armed men." The report, by the International Rescue Committee, does not specify whether those men are primarily from government forces or from rebel ranks. Timeline: Major events in the country's tumultuous uprising that began in March 2011. Family members are often forced to watch, according to the report, and gang rape is not uncommon. In addition, it says, there is an "alarming lack" of medical and psychological support for survivors of the attacks. [Washington Post](#)

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France will ask EU to curb use of newer birth control pills

11 January - French health authorities will ask the European Union to restrict the use of newer types of contraceptive pills over concerns they might carry health risks. France's health minister Marisol Touraine said on Friday the newer pills, which have caught on because they reduce side effects from earlier versions such as weight gain and acne, should only be prescribed by specialist doctors to women who cannot use other types of contraception... While all oral contraceptives are associated with a risk of blood clots, a number of studies suggest the most recent third and fourth-generation pills carry a higher risk than their predecessors. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) says the risk of an embolism, or blood clot, is twice as high for women using third and fourth-generation pills than for those using earlier versions, although it remains low. [Reuters](#)

Germany: Mass donor organ fraud shakes Germany

9 January - German medical authorities are calling for an extensive overhaul of the country's organ transplant programme after transplant centres across Germany were placed under criminal investigation over allegations that they had systematically manipulated donor waiting lists. Scores of patients are believed to have been given priority access to donor organs after doctors falsified the severity of their illnesses to ensure they received treatment ahead of other patients in Europe. The revelations have led to accusations of widespread corruption and dishonesty in the system, and shattered public trust. Since the scandal emerged last year as a handful of cases that were initially believed to be isolated incidents, the number of Germans willing to donate organs has plummeted. [Guardian](#)

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Canada: More kids taking alternative therapies, but doctors rarely told: study

14 January - A growing number of Canadian children with chronic illnesses are being treated with complementary medicine, researchers say, but parents don't always tell doctors they are using the alternative therapies... In a survey of parents having their children treated at two Canadian pediatric hospitals, researchers found that alternative medicines and such therapies as massage and chiropractic were commonly used. At Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton, 71 per cent of parents surveyed said they treated their kids with complementary medicine, while 42 per cent of parents attending the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) in Ottawa reported their use. [CTV News](#)

U.S.: Buffalo VA hospital investigates possible HIV and hepatitis exposure

14 January - The Buffalo Veterans Administration Hospital is investigating a possible patient exposure of HIV and hepatitis strains via accidentally reused insulin pens. 700 diabetic patients may have been exposed to the diseases between October 19, 2010 and November 2012, according to a hospital statement and published reports cited by the Associated Press... VA spokeswoman Evangeline Conley said the hospital "...discovered that in some cases, insulin pens were not labeled for individual patients, adding that "although the pen needles were always changed, an insulin pen may have been used on more than one patient." [Global Post](#)

U.S.: FDA clears novel test for infectious gastroenteritis

15 January - The first test that can simultaneously detect 11 common viral, bacterial, and parasitic causes of infectious gastroenteritis from a single patient sample has been cleared for marketing by the US Food and Drug Administration, the agency announced today... The xTAG Gastrointestinal Pathogen Panel (GPP), from Luminex Inc, is a multiplexed nucleic acid test that detects the following 7 bacterial causes of gastroenteritis: Campylobacter, Clostridium difficile toxin A/B, Escherichia coli O157, enterotoxigenic E coli (ETEC) LT/ST, Salmonella, Shigella, and Shiga-like toxin producing E coli (STEC) stx 1/stx 2. The test also detects 2 viruses (norovirus and rotavirus A) and 2 parasites (Cryptosporidium and Giardia), which are other common causes of gastroenteritis. [Medscape](#)

U.S.: Obama calls for changes to mental health care

16 January - Mental health advocates hailed President Obama's sweeping agenda to improve mental health care, part of his larger plan to reduce gun violence in the USA following the shooting last month in Newtown, Conn. After decades of disappointment, advocates for the mentally ill said they are cautiously optimistic that the nation may finally take meaningful action to repair a broken system... While Obama called on Congress to take a number of steps, he also listed a number of executive actions that he will take himself. See article for agenda items. [USA Today](#)

U.S.: Obama makes biggest gun-control push in decades

16 January - President Barack Obama launched the biggest U.S. gun-control push in generations on Wednesday, urging Congress to approve an assault weapons ban and background checks for all gun buyers to prevent mass shootings like the Newtown school massacre. Rolling out a wide-ranging plan for executive and legislative action to curb gun violence, Obama set up a fierce clash with the powerful U.S. gun lobby and its supporters in Congress, who will resist what they see as an encroachment on constitutionally protected gun rights. [Reuters](#)

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Australia: Climbing temperatures put health at risk

13 Jan - The heat kills more Australians than the road toll according to a coalition of health bodies working to increase awareness of the risks of extreme heat. The Australian Medical Association, the Climate and Health Alliance and the Climate Commission issued a health alert today to urge people to take care of themselves on hot days, to be aware of the dangers of extreme heat and follow health and medical advice on how to stay cool. Liz Hanna, Climate and Health Alliance President and Convenor of the Climate Change Adaptation Research Network - Human Health at the Australian National University said most people aren't aware of the dangers of the heat. She said the frequency of heat related illnesses would only increase as the temperatures experienced in last week's heatwave become the norm. [Sydney Morning Herald](#)

Bangladesh bats harbouring deadly Ebola variant

17 January - Fruit bats in Bangladesh are harbouring a new version of Ebola virus, which causes severe hemorrhagic fever, a fatal condition afflicting humans and primates, says a new finding. The study by EcoHealth Alliance, a non profit organisation that focuses on local conservation and global health issues, extends the range of this lethal disease further than previously suspected to now include mainland Asia. [Zee News](#)

Bangladesh sets "death clock" updating tobacco-related deaths

13 January - Bangladesh unveiled a "Death Clock" in its capital to raise awareness about smoking-related deaths in a country which ranks among the world's highest in tobacco consumption. Around 57,000 people die annually from tobacco-related diseases in Bangladesh, on average 156 people per day, said Sayed Badrul Karim from the Progga NGO, which is supported by the Washington-based Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK). The "Death Clock", which keeps a rolling tally of people dying of tobacco-related illnesses each day, was installed on a busy road near Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's residence and on the way to the national parliament house in the capital Dhaka. [Reuters](#)

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Cuba: Cholera in the time of modern medicine

17 January - Cholera, a disease from the past when wooden ships sailed the world's oceans spreading trade, plague and empire, has reared its head in Cuba for the second time in recent months with the latest outbreak infecting at least 51 people in the capital Havana, a

city with 2.2 million residents. The Cuban Health Ministry has not reported any deaths from the new set of cases and released a statement that the outbreak, which was first detected Jan. 6, appeared to originate from a food vendor working in unsanitary conditions, according to CNN. The ministry added that it is currently taking preventive measures that have put the disease "on the way to extinction," Al Jazeera reported. [International Business Times](#)

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