

21 December 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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There will be no APH Weekly Update next week. Publication will resume on 4 January 2013. HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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If you have comments or questions about the update, please **contact us**. We welcome your comments. Please feel free to share this update with others who may be interested.



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U.S. MILITARY

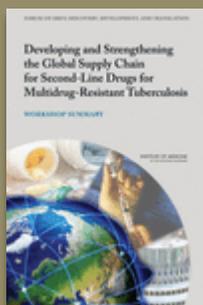
Air Force studies effects of highly popular, super-caffeinated drinks

17 December - Amid growing concern about the effects of energy drink consumption, an Air Force researcher is conducting the service's first comprehensive study of energy drink

Developing and Strengthening the Global Supply Chain for Second-Line Drugs for Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis - Workshop Summary

Patients diagnosed with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis face lengthy treatment regimens of two years or more with daily, directly observed treatment with second-line anti-TB drugs (SLDs) that are less potent, more toxic, and more expensive than those used to treat drug-susceptible TB.

A strengthened global supply chain for SLDs could save lives by consistently delivering high quality medicines to more of the people who need them. Ensuring a reliable and affordable supply of high-quality SLDs is a complex public health intervention that, so far, has not been organized or implemented in a way that allows all providers and patients access to SLDs when they are needed.



usage among the force's active-duty and civilian personnel. "We just don't know how much folks are consuming them — in quantities, duration and what's driving it," said Maj. Nicholas Milazzo, chief of pharmacy research for the 60th Medical Group's clinical investigation facility at Travis Air Force Base, Calif. Launched in September, the online survey targets 12 bases. Two are in Europe — Aviano and Lakenheath air bases — and the others in the States. Previous Air Force studies on energy drink usage have been limited to one base... Milazzo said there have been no reports of deaths attributed to energy drinks in the military, but the limited knowledge about the physical effects of energy drinks and how many Air Force personnel consume them is a potential health risk. [Stars and Stripes](#)

Analysis: The militarization of hospital beds



20 December - Delivering health aid to hotspots including Haiti and Afghanistan has brought together - and at times pitted against one another - humanitarians and militaries in an uneasy but increasingly necessary union. As the military's role in health aid is likely to grow - since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the US military has deployed 40 times to natural disasters worldwide - delineating the rules and responsibilities of each side in the field has become all the more necessary. Even after some two decades of working more closely with militaries to deliver aid, researchers and humanitarians are still divided about such cooperation in health care... "To have any type of weapon near a health structure makes them the target in conflict. That is why a no-weapon strategy is the best way to guarantee patients' security," Michiel Hofman, a UK-based operations adviser for health NGO Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), told IRIN in early 2012.

[IRIN](#)

Army releases November suicide data

13 December - The Army released suicide data today for the month of November. During November, among active-duty soldiers, there were 12 potential suicides: one has been confirmed as a suicide and 11 remain under investigation. For October, the Army reported 20 potential suicides among active-duty soldiers; since the release of that report, one case has been removed for a total of 19 cases: nine have been confirmed as suicides and 10 remain under investigation. For 2012, there have been 177 potential active-duty suicides: 113 have been confirmed as suicides and 64 remain under investigation. Active-duty suicide number for 2011: 165 confirmed as suicides and no cases under investigation.

[Defense.gov](#)

Costs of war: Excess health care burdens during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

November - This report estimates the health care burden related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan by calculating the difference between the total health care delivered to U.S. military members during wartime (October 2001 to June 2012) and that which would have been delivered if pre-war (January 1998 to August 2001) rates of ambulatory visits, hospitalizations, and hospital bed days of active component members of the U.S. Armed Forces had persisted during the war. Overall, there were estimated excesses of 17,023,491

Immunization Continuing Education

A new calendar is posted to the MILVAX website. The calendar shows immunization-specific training offered in-person and online. It highlights training to meet the 8-hour annual education requirement at little or no cost to the trainee.



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.

ambulatory visits, 66,768 hospitalizations, and 634,720 hospital bed days during the war period relative to that expected based on pre-war experience. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

FDA approves raxibacumab to treat inhalational anthrax

14 December - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration today approved raxibacumab injection to treat inhalational anthrax, a form of the infectious disease caused by breathing in the spores of the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*. Raxibacumab also is approved to prevent inhalational anthrax when alternative therapies are not available or not appropriate... "In addition to antibiotics, raxibacumab will be a useful treatment to have available should an anthrax bioterrorism event occur," said Edward Cox, M.D., M.P.H, director of the Office of Antimicrobial Products in FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. "Although antibiotics are approved to prevent and treat anthrax infection, raxibacumab is the first approved agent that acts by neutralizing the toxins produced by *B. anthracis*." [FDA](#)

Paper links nerve agents in '91 Gulf War and ailments

13 December - Reviving a 20-year debate over illnesses of veterans of the 1991 Persian Gulf war, a new scientific paper presents evidence that nerve agents released by the bombing of Iraqi chemical weapons depots just before the ground war began could have carried downwind and fallen on American troops staged in Saudi Arabia. The paper, [published in the journal Neuroepidemiology](#), tries to rebut the longstanding Pentagon position, supported by many scientists, that neurotoxins, particularly sarin gas, could not have carried far enough to sicken American forces. The authors are James J. Tuite and Dr. Robert Haley, who has written several papers asserting links between chemical exposures and gulf war illnesses. They assembled data from meteorological and intelligence reports to support their thesis that American bombs were powerful enough to propel sarin from depots in Muthanna and Falluja high into the atmosphere, where winds whisked it hundreds of miles south to the Saudi border. [New York Times](#)

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GLOBAL

Global malaria battle stalls as financing gets tight

17 December - Global funding for the fight against malaria has stalled in the past two years, threatening to reverse what the World Health Organisation (WHO) says are "remarkable recent gains" in the battle to control one of the world's leading infectious killers. After rapid expansion between 2004 and 2009, funding for malaria prevention and control leveled off between 2010 and 2012 - meaning there were fewer life-saving steps taken in hard-hit malarial regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. "If we don't scale up vector control activities in 2013 we can expect major resurgences of malaria," said Richard Cibulskis, lead author of the WHO's World Malaria Report, which was published on Monday. "Vector control" means

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stopping transmission of the disease with tools such as treated mosquito nets. The report found that deliveries of such nets to endemic countries in sub-Saharan Africa dropped from 145 million in 2010 to an estimated 66 million in 2012. [Reuters](#)

Obesity - the big picture

15 December - A huge new global health study, led by Christopher Murray of the University of Washington, shows that since 1990 obesity has grown faster than any other cause of disease. For women a high BMI is now the third-largest driver of illness. At the same time childhood mortality has dropped and the average age of the world's population has risen rapidly. In combination these trends may mark a shift in public-health priorities.

Increasingly, early death is less of a worry than decades spent alive and sick. [Economist](#)

Successful results against human leishmaniasis with a more efficient and economic vaccine

19 December - A research coordinated by the UAB has succeeded in testing a vaccine against leishmaniasis. The vaccine was tested with the best animal model existing, the golden hamster, and can be produced at low costs by using insect larvae. The research, published in the latest edition of *PLoS ONE*, is an important step towards the fight against a disease which causes the death of 70,000 people each year in developing countries and of countless dogs, which also suffer from this disease and are its natural reservoir. [EurekAlert](#)

Vaccine rule is said to hurt health efforts

17 December - A group of prominent doctors and public health experts warns in articles to be published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics* that banning [thimerosal](#), a mercury compound used as a preservative in vaccines, would devastate public health efforts in developing countries. Representatives from governments around the world will meet in Geneva next month in a session convened by the United Nations Environmental Program to prepare a global treaty to reduce health hazards by banning certain products and processes that release mercury into the environment. But a proposal that the ban include thimerosal, which has been used since the 1930s to prevent bacterial and fungal contamination in multidose vials of vaccines, has drawn strong criticism from pediatricians. They say that the ethyl-mercury compound is critical for vaccine use in the developing world, where multidose vials are a mainstay. [New York Times](#)

When the doctor is not needed

15 December - There is already a shortage of doctors in many parts of the United States. The expansion of health care coverage to millions of uninsured Americans under the Affordable Care Act will make that shortage even worse. Expanding medical schools and residency programs could help in the long run. But a sensible solution to this crisis — particularly to address the short supply of primary care doctors — is to rely much more on nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, community members and even the patients themselves to do many of the routine tasks traditionally reserved for doctors. There is plenty of evidence that well-trained health workers can provide routine service that is

every bit as good or even better than what patients would receive from a doctor. And because they are paid less than the doctors, they can save the patient and the health care system money. [New York Times](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary

For the week ending 20 December 2012,

- Throughout the MHS, Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) incidence rates decreased or remained the same compared to last week except for EUCOM unvaccinated with an increased rate; the percent of all outpatient visits due to Pneumonia and Influenza (P&I) remained stable from previous week.
- Influenza activity is at moderate levels across the overseas DoD laboratory surveillance network, except in Europe where the activity remains low; 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 93%.
[AFHSC DoD Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 49 (December 2-8, 2012), influenza activity increased in the U.S.

- Viral Surveillance: Of 7,663 specimens tested, 2,172 (28.3%) were positive for influenza.
- Novel Influenza A Virus: One human infection with a novel influenza A virus was reported.
- Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality: The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below the epidemic threshold.
- Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths: One influenza-associated pediatric death was reported and was associated with an influenza B virus. [FluView](#)

DoD Global Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Program

- During week 49 (2-8 December 2012), 79 specimens were collected and tested from 29 locations. There was one influenza B at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, MD and 32 influenza A/H3 viruses detected (see Table 1 below). Results are preliminary and may change as more results are received.

- In Week 49, 41.8% of respiratory specimens collected and tested were positive for influenza.
- To date, 619 specimens have been submitted and tested from 56 locations of which 118 were positive for influenza A (two co-infections of A/H3 & B, 110 A/H3, and six A(H1N1pdm09) and seven were positive for influenza B. There have been 64 other respiratory viruses isolated (16 adenovirus, seven RSV, seven enterovirus, and 34 parainfluenza). [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

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

During week 49 (3-9 December 2012), all 24 countries reporting experienced low-intensity levels of influenza-like illness or acute respiratory infection. For the first time this season, the majority of the countries reported sporadic geographic spread and eight countries experienced increasing trends.

- Of 573 sentinel specimens tested in 24 countries, 76 (13.3%) were positive for influenza virus. This is the second consecutive week with a notable increase in the proportion of influenza-positive samples since the start of the season.
- Since week 40/2012, 53% of influenza virus detections in sentinel specimens have been type A and 47% type B viruses. Of the A viruses subtyped, 47% were A(H3) and 53% were A(H1). [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#)

GlaxoSmithKline wins U.S. approval for new flu vaccine

17 December - U.S. health regulators have approved a new four-strain seasonal influenza vaccine made by GlaxoSmithKline Plc (GSK.L), the company said on Monday. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved Fluarix Quadrivalent to immunize children age 3 and older and adults against flu virus subtypes A and B contained in the vaccine. It is the first intramuscular vaccine to protect against four influenza strains. Three-strain flu vaccines currently administered help protect against the two most common A virus strains and the B strain expected to be predominant in a given year, the company said. [Reuters](#)

Google.org: Flu Trends

19 December - Estimates of flu activity based on Internet search queries indicate that the levels of flu activity in the northern hemisphere range from minimal in eastern Europe to high in the U.S. and Russia. Levels range from minimal to low in the southern hemisphere. [Google.org Flu Trends](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 15 December 2012:

Influenza

No new NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza cases 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 FRI rates were at or below expected values. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 8 December 2012 (Week 49), influenza activity remains high for this time of year; 18 states report widespread activity. Vaccination efforts should continue. WRMC and NRMCC saw the highest proportion of positive Influenza A specimens.

- ILI Activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 49 were 7% higher than the same week last year.
- Influenza cases: Three hospitalized influenza cases were reported in DRSi in week 49. A total of eight hospitalized cases have been reported during this influenza season.
- Acute Respiratory Disease at BCT sites: ARDS rates remain lower at all Army BCT sites compared to the same period last year. Despite high civilian rates in the southeast, no increased influenza activity has been noted in trainees.
- Viral specimens: During week 49, 237 of 784 (30%) clinical specimens tested were positive for respiratory pathogens. Influenza A accounted for 71% of positive specimens. [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Experts at NIH meeting say H5N1 research moratorium may end soon

18 December – As a meeting to discuss issues related to federally funded H5N1 avian influenza research wrapped up today, experts anticipated that a voluntary moratorium on work with lab-modified strains that have increased transmissibility might end soon and said they sensed agreement about lab biosecurity levels... Lab biosafety is one of the issues that have stalled the lifting of the moratorium, which has been in place for nearly a year. [CIDRAP](#)

Influenza at the human-animal interface

17 December - From 2003 through 17 December 2012, 610 laboratory-confirmed human cases with avian influenza A(H5N1) virus infection have been officially reported to WHO from 15 countries, of which 360 died. Since January 2012, 32 human cases of influenza A(H5N1) virus infection have been reported to WHO. Since the last update on 5 November 2012, two new laboratory-confirmed human cases with influenza A(H5N1) virus infection were reported to WHO, one from Egypt and the other a fatal case from Indonesia. [WHO](#)

Pigs in southern China infected with avian flu

19 December - Researchers report for the first time the seroprevalence of three strains of avian influenza viruses in pigs in southern China, but not the H5N1 avian influenza virus ... In the study, from 2010-2012, Guihong Zhang and colleagues of the College of Veterinary Medicine, South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou, People's Republic of China, tested 1080 21-25 week old pigs for H3, H4, H5, and H6 subtypes of avian influenza virus, and H1 and H3 subtypes of swine influenza virus. Thirty-five percent of the serum samples were positive for H1N1, and 19.7 percent were positive for H3N2 swine flu virus, and 0.93 percent, 1.6 percent, and 1.8 percent were positive, respectively, for the H3, H4, and H6 subtypes of avian influenza A virus. However, no serum samples collected in 2001 were positive for any of these viruses, indicating that transmission into swine was recent.

[EurekAlert](#)

With more surveillance, flu patterns in Africa begin to emerge

17 December – Increased surveillance in recent years has begun to fill in some of the huge information gaps regarding influenza in Africa, which should eventually make it possible to develop or improve public health interventions, according to a big collection of articles published recently in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases (JID)*. One of the many reported findings is that several countries in West Africa didn't see their first case of pandemic 2009 H1N1 (pH1N1) flu until 6 months after the virus emerged in North America. Another article discusses the belated distribution and administration of the pH1N1 vaccine in Africa. The collection consists of 27 reports involving close to 300 authors from more than 50 institutions, most of them based in 16 African countries, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a press release. [CIDRAP](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

Under many aliases, mislabeled foods find their way to dinner tables

15 December - ... The subject of deceptive restaurant menus took on new life last week when Oceana, an international organization dedicated to ocean conservation, released a report with the headline "Widespread Seafood Fraud Found in New York City." Using genetic testing, the group found tilapia and tilefish posing as red snapper. Farmed salmon was sold as wild. Escolar, which can also legally be called oil fish, was disguised as white tuna, which is an unofficial nickname for albacore tuna. Every one of 16 sushi bars investigated sold the researchers mislabeled fish. In all, 39 percent of the seafood from 81 grocery stores and restaurants was not what the establishment claimed it was. [New York Times](#)

[Times](#)

USDA sets rules for tracking livestock across state lines

20 December - The U.S. Department of Agriculture on Thursday announced final rules meant to improve the ability to trace livestock across state lines when there are disease outbreaks. The regulations, which were laid out as proposals in August 2011, had their genesis in the handful of cases of mad cow disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy, in the United States dating back to 2003. USDA's initial proposals were attacked by farmers and ranchers as burdensome and too expensive. Under the final rule, unless specifically exempted, livestock moved across state lines would have to be officially identified and accompanied by an interstate certificate of veterinary inspection or other documentation, such as owner-shipper statements or brand certificates. [Reuters](#)

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WELLNESS

Daylight savings tied to bump in heart attack rates

16 December - Setting the clock ahead for daylight savings time may set the scene for a small increase in heart attacks the next day, according to a U.S. study - which suggests that sleep deprivation may be to blame. Researchers at two hospitals in the U.S. state of Michigan, whose findings appeared in the American Journal of Cardiology, reviewed six years of records and found that they treated an average of 23 heart attacks on the Sunday when the United States switched to daylight savings time. That compared to 13 on a typical Sunday. [Reuters](#)

Do health care workers practice what they preach?

19 December - Health care workers may not always "practice what they preach" when it comes to keeping up to date with cancer screenings, maintaining a healthy weight and not smoking, a new study suggests. Researchers found people surveyed by phone who said their job involved direct patient care were just as likely to be overweight, avoid the dentist, get sunburned and not wear their seatbelt as those in other fields. Health care workers, however, were more likely to have had a recent check-up and to report exercising in the past month - findings that were "reassuring," researchers said. They were also less apt to drink heavily, according to results published this week in the Archives of Internal Medicine.

[Reuters](#)

Patients who Google hemorrhoids may want to avoid doctor

19 December - Google's annual roundup of the year's top search trends revealed that people took to the internet to learn more about Whitney Houston, Hurricane Sandy and Big Bird, but an unlikely pain in the butt joined the group, too: hemorrhoids. The top trending

health issue in the United States this year was "hemorrhoids," according to Google's annual "zeitgeist" roundup of the world's hottest search trends, and doctors say it may be because patients would rather ask Google than their physicians. [ABC News](#)

Regular marijuana use by teens continues to be a concern

19 December - Continued high use of marijuana by the nation's eighth, 10th and 12th graders combined with a drop in perceptions of its potential harms was revealed in this year's Monitoring the Future survey, an annual survey of eighth, 10th, and 12th-graders conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan. The survey was carried out in classrooms around the country earlier this year, under a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health. The 2012 survey shows that 6.5 percent of high school seniors smoke marijuana daily, up from 5.1 percent five years ago. Nearly 23 percent say they smoked it in the month prior to the survey, and just over 36 percent say they smoked within the previous year. [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

Scientists in Hong Kong map initial anti-aging formula

20 December - Scientists in Hong Kong appear to have mapped out a formula that can delay the aging process in mice, a discovery they hope to replicate in people. Their finding, published in the December issue of Cell Metabolism, builds on their work in 2005 which shed light on premature aging, or progeria, a rare genetic disease that affects one in four million babies. [Reuters](#)

Small changes in eating prompts weight loss

19 December - Making small easy changes to our eating habits on a consistent basis - 25 days or more per month - can lead to sustainable weight loss, according to research by Professor Brian Wansink in Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab... To explore this issue, Cornell researchers launched the National Mindless Eating Challenge (NMEC), an online healthy eating and weight loss program that focused on simple eating behavior changes, instead of dieting. NMEC participants... were sent three customized tips to follow for a month. All tips were founded on research and based on Wansink's book "Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More than We Think" (Bantam, 2006)... Of the 504 participants who completed at least one follow-up survey, more than two thirds (42 percent) either lost weight or maintained their weight (27 percent). Weight loss was highest among people who made changes consistently. Those whose adherence was 25 or more days per month reported an average monthly weight loss of 2 pounds. [EurekAlert](#)

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Ethiopia introduces health-care phone service

14 December - Ethiopia is launching medical services over the phone. A young Ethiopian doctor is starting the service in an attempt to improve access to health care across the country. "HelloDoctor" is Ethiopia's first general medical hotline, in which a small fee is taken from a person's mobile phone credit to receive medical advice or request home-care service. Dr. Yohans Wodaje is the young Ethiopian doctor who founded HelloDoctor. He said that healthcare services for the average Ethiopian will improve through the new service, as there are not enough doctors and clinics for the whole population.... "And you have a very few number of highly skilled, highly specialized professionals, then you definitely need to link technology with those professionals to multiply the effect that they would have."

[Voice of America](#)

Guinea: New cholera strain poses prevention challenges

18 December - The cholera that struck more than 7,000 people in Guinea this year was caused by a new generation of cholera strains - atypical variants of vibrio cholerae O1 El Tor, epidemiologists have confirmed. The new strains secrete a toxin severer than usual strains, creating a more virulent illness - with harsher symptoms and a higher infection rate, according to cholera experts in the region. The same types of strain are believed to be in Sierra Leone, where cholera affected 22,345 people this year: the bacteria are thought to have come to Guinea from Sierra Leone. For now, genetic sequencing has been done only on samples from Guinea; analysis of Sierra Leone samples is under way. [IRIN](#)

Quick and affordable test is saving lives in areas still ravaged by "Black Death"



7 December - CDC scientists are developing better ways of detecting the world's most deadly diseases. In this guest blog post, Dr. Paul Mead, a medical epidemiologist with the Division of Vector-Borne Diseases (DVBD) at CDC, explains how he and a team of scientists are using a quick and affordable handheld

test to detect plague in patients in a matter of minutes – critical for such a rapidly fatal disease. This tool – developed by Dr. Marty Schriefer and his team at DVBD – is being used in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and village leaders to save lives in rural Uganda, where laboratories for diagnosing diseases like plague are rare. In addition to improving the diagnosis and treatment of plague in communities still ravaged by the disease, DVBD is evaluating ways to prevent human plague altogether by reducing exposure to rats and their disease-causing fleas. [CDC](#)

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Karzai admits lack of proper healthcare system in Afghanistan

17 December - Afghan president Hamid Karzai on Sunday admitted that daily issues of Afghans regarding a proper health system in the country. It has become common among the Afghans who are saying that the healthcare has been turned into a major business in Afghanistan... There have been growing complaints regarding the activities of the private hospitals despite Afghan public health ministry has said they have increased monitoring the operations of the hospitals. Dozens of private hospitals have started operations in capital Kabul and other provinces of Afghanistan however people are continuously complaining regarding the activities, lack of profession of the doctors and high charges. In the meantime the private hospitals are paying more privilege and wages to the doctors and nurses which have limited the service of the government hospitals. [Khaama Press](#)

Pakistan: Gunmen kill women who were giving children polio vaccines

18 December - Gunmen shot dead five female health workers who were immunizing children against polio on Tuesday, causing the Pakistani government to suspend vaccinations in two cities and dealing a fresh setback to an eradication campaign dogged by Taliban resistance in a country that is one of the disease's last global strongholds... No group claimed responsibility for the attacks, but most suspicion focused on the Pakistani Taliban, which has previously blocked polio vaccinators and complained that the United States is using the program as a cover for espionage. [New York Times](#)

Syria: IDPs brace for winter in rebel-controlled camps

19 December - ... They are among 4,000 people marooned in more than 500 tents at Qah camp for displaced people close to the Turkish border, set up three months ago. More families arrive every day, many from Hass. Another 10,000 people live nearby in the only other known camp in the north, called Atma. Across the country, at least 2.5 million people are internally displaced within Syria, according to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Cold and afraid, many here say they want desperately to leave Syria's nearly two-year conflict behind and cross into Turkey. But for the moment, their northern neighbour has refused to accept them, citing overcrowding. Fourteen Turkish camps, hosting 141,000 people, are already well over capacity, with thousands of people sleeping in communal tents or in neighbouring villages for lack of space. [IRIN](#)

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Irish government to legalize life-saving abortion

18 December - Ireland's government pledged Tuesday to pass a law soon that will allow women to receive abortions if continued pregnancy threatens their lives — including from their own threats to commit suicide if denied one. The announcement comes after decades of inaction on abortion in Ireland, and just weeks after the predominantly Catholic country faced international criticism over the death of an Indian woman hospitalized in Ireland with an imminent miscarriage... This would mark the first time that Irish lawmakers have ever voted on abortion, arguably the most divisive issue in a country whose constitution bans the practice. [ABC News](#)

United Kingdom: Norovirus - vomiting bug cases are up by 80 per cent

19 December - ... The number of laboratory-confirmed cases of norovirus is 83 per cent higher than the same time last year, the Health Protection Agency said. The bug has swept the country, leading to the closure of dozens of hospital wards. It has also affected holidaymakers on two cruise ships. So far there have been 3,046 confirmed cases in England and Wales, compared with 1,669 cases last winter, but for every reported case there are likely to be a further 288 unreported sufferers. During the fortnight ending 16 December, there were 61 outbreaks in hospitals in England. [Independent](#)

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After shootings, a flood of ideas and proposals for curbing gun violence

19 December - The flurry of proposals for responding to the massacre in Newtown, Conn., have come from all quarters: the White House, members of Congress, advocacy organizations, religious leaders, governors and state and county legislators. Specifics are hard to come by in some cases. But taken together, the suggestions for legislative and executive action foreshadow a broad political debate about assault weapons, ammunition, violent video games, shoot-em-up movies, gun shows, mental health services, and permits for concealed firearms. Much of the national discussion this week has focused on a comprehensive approach, rather than just new gun controls. [New York Times](#)

DHS to re-examine possible health effects of backscatter X-ray

17 December - The Homeland Security Department is asking the National Academy of Sciences to find an independent group to study whether airport backscatter X-ray security scanners pose any health risk. In a notice published Dec. 13 on FedBizOpps, DHS asks the academy to convene a committee to report on whether exposure to ionizing radiation from the machines complies with health and safety standards, and whether adequate procedures are in place to prevent overexposure to travelers and operators. The committee will review earlier studies as well as examine what DHS and equipment manufacturers have done to estimate radiation exposure. [Fierce Homeland Security](#)

HIV cases decline for black women, increase for gay men: CDC

19 December - Fewer black women in the United States are being infected with HIV, but the number of young gay and bisexual men infected is rising, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Wednesday. Between 2008 and 2010, the number of newly infected black women dropped 21 percent, according to the CDC report. Yet despite the decline, they still accounted for 70 percent of all new HIV cases among women, the federal health agency said. The rate of new infections for black women was 20 times higher than the rate for white women, the CDC said. The number of new infections among young gay and bisexual men increased by 22 percent during that same two-year period, the CDC said. The number of new HIV infections diagnosed annually in the overall U.S. population remained unchanged between 2008 and 2010 at about 47,500, according to health officials. [Reuters](#)

New air pollution standards restrict soot particles

14 December - The Obama administration announced a new air pollution standard Friday that would bring about a 20% reduction in microscopic particles of soot emitted by coal-fired power plants and diesel vehicles that contribute to haze and respiratory ailments... Right now, 99% of U.S. counties are in compliance with the new standard, the EPA said. Of the remaining, many of them will be in California, the EPA said. [Los Angeles Times](#)

No clear link between cancer and 9/11 debris, study finds

18 December - Six months after the federal government added cancer to the list of sicknesses covered by the \$4.3 billion World Trade Center fund, a New York City health department study has found no clear link between cancer and the dust, debris and fumes released by the burning wreckage of the twin towers. The study was by far the largest to date. It examined 55,700 people, including rescue and recovery workers who were present at the World Trade Center site, on barges or at the Staten Island landfill where debris was taken in the nine months after Sept. 11, 2001, as well as residents of Lower Manhattan, students, workers and passers-by exposed on the day of the terrorist attacks. Over all, there was no increase in the cancer rate of those studied compared with the rate of the general population, researchers concluded after looking at 23 cancers from 2003 to 2008. [New York Times](#)

Senators call for return of assault weapon ban

17 December - In light of the school shooting in Newtown, Conn., Robert Siegel speaks with Dr. Daniel Webster of John Hopkins University about the legislative history and debate about the assault weapons ban... Professor Daniel Webster studies firearm policy and gun violence prevention. His field is public health, and he's at Johns Hopkins University...

WEBSTER: ... What's really most relevant to public safety has to do with the capacity to fire dozens of bullets, perhaps in some instances, in a matter of seconds. So it would make more sense to sort of focus on the functionality and the thing that's most relevant.

SIEGEL: The University of Pennsylvania study - that I think you were alluding to - wrote that the ban exempted assault weapons and large-capacity magazines manufactured before September 13, 1994. At that time, there were upwards of 1.5 million privately held assault weapons in the U.S. and nearly 25 million guns equipped with large-capacity magazines. So, certainly, a great many weapons escape the impact of the ban.

WEBSTER: That's right. My understanding is that Senator Feinstein's new legislation would try to go beyond what the prior legislation focused on and actually go for a broad ban even for so-called grandfathered weapons. I think that'll be harder to do politically. But if it does go through, I think it has a far better chance for impact. [NPR](#)

TB's global resurgence amplifies U.S. risk

18 December - ... Multidrug-resistant TB is at epidemic proportions in some parts of the world—a growing problem the U.S. is surprisingly unprepared for. The U.S. beat back multidrug-resistant tuberculosis in the 1990s. Today, however, a new threat is emerging as drug resistance worsens abroad and far more dangerous strains develop and spread, including some that are all but untreatable with standard drugs. In the U.S., rates of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis remain low, but are starting to inch back up, as hundreds of millions of American citizens and foreigners alike travel to the U.S. from abroad every year. At the same time, funding and expertise are in decline. [Wall Street Journal](#)

Use of selected contraception methods among women aged 15–44 years currently using contraception

21 December - Little change occurred from 1995 to 2006–2010 in the percentage of women aged 15–44 years currently using contraception who were using female or male sterilization or the pill as their most effective method. A decrease occurred in the percentage of women relying on condoms, and increases occurred in the percentages of women using other hormonal methods and the IUD. The pill (28%) and female sterilization (27%) remained the most common contraceptive methods used. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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Australia: Whooping cough epidemic as state records highest numbers

18 December - A whooping cough epidemic has led NSW to record its highest number of new cases of the disease. More than 13,000 people were infected in 2011, and one baby died, surveillance figures published in the CSIRO's NSW Public Health Bulletin show... Overall, vaccine-preventable diseases increased in 2011, with rates of measles more than tripling from 26 cases in 2010 to 90 in 2011. Vaccination rates are currently greater than 90 per cent for one and two-year-old children, according to separate research published in the same journal. Study leader Brynley Hull, an epidemiologist from the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, said a high-profile increase in so-called "conscientious objectors" across Australia had not affected vaccination rates. [Sydney Morning Herald](#)

China: Donation of organs directed to the needy

15 December - China is set to expand a computerized system to ensure transparent and fair allocation of donor organs, said Vice-Minister of Health Huang Jiefu. The system is expected to expand nationwide early next year for transplants around the mainland. Once that happens, donated organs from different procurement organizations will be shared by all transplant centers to improve efficiency and ensure the most medically needy patients benefit, according to Wang Haibo, director of the China Organ Transplant Response System Research Center at the University of Hong Kong. [China Daily](#)

Philippines OKs divisive contraceptives bill

17 December - Philippine legislators passed a landmark bill Monday that would provide government funding for contraceptives and sexuality classes in schools despite strong opposition by the dominant Roman Catholic Church and its followers, some of whom threatened to ask the Supreme Court to block the legislation. The Senate and the House of Representatives passed different versions of the bill, which languished in Congress for more than a decade as legislators avoided colliding with the influential church. The two versions will have to be reconciled before President Benigno Aquino III has an opportunity to sign the legislation. [Yahoo! News](#)

Pollution from car emissions killing millions in China and India



17 December - An explosion of car use has made fast-growing Asian cities the epicentre of global air pollution and become, along with obesity, the world's fastest growing cause of death according to a major study of global diseases. In 2010, more than 2.1m people in Asia died prematurely from air pollution, mostly from the minute particles of diesel soot and gasses emitted from

cars and lorries. Other causes of air pollution include construction and industry. Of these deaths, says the study published in The Lancet, 1.2 million were in east Asia and China, and 712,000 in south Asia, including India. Worldwide, a record 3.2m people a year died from air pollution in 2010, compared with 800,000 in 2000. It now ranks for the first time in the world's top 10 list of killer diseases, says the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study.

[Guardian](#)

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Cuba (Havana): Cholera, diarrhea and dysentery update 2012

19 December - A reporter for the independent news agency reported in Cuba dozens of new cases of cholera in Havana while authorities of the island made urgent appeals to the population to prevent further increased number of patients. Information was provided by Mario Echevarria, Let's Talk Press, based in Havana. Echevarria said that Public Health Ministry officials have declared a "state of alert" in certain areas of Old Havana. The order was established recently after house to house inspection, he said. "A doctor, who preferred to remain anonymous said that they have 47 cases detected in the town Habana Vieja, 17 are natural capital and 33 come from the eastern provinces," said the journalist. He also said that the authorities have activated emergency stations. In August 2012, the Cuban government said the cholera crisis was over after 3 deaths and 417 confirmed cases.

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