

16 December 2016

# Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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 Command.

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## Notice:

There will be no Army Public Health Weekly Updates for the next two weeks. Publication will resume on 6 January 2017.

## Subscription or Comments

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## Acetaminophen overdoses, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2006–2015

November 2016 - Acetaminophen, a drug commonly used to relieve pain and fever, is generally safe and effective when used as directed. However, acetaminophen overdose can cause serious adverse events, including liver damage and death. From 2006 through 2015, a total of 2,588 cases of acetaminophen overdose were identified in active component military members. Rates of acetaminophen overdose declined during this 10-year surveillance period, from 2.2 cases per 10,000 person-years (p-yrs) in 2006 to 1.2 cases per 10,000 p-yrs in 2015. Rates of overdose were higher among females, members of the Army, and service members younger than 25 years of age. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

## Satellites, airport visibility readings shed light on troops' exposure to air pollution

8 December - Using data from NASA satellites and airport visibility sensors, Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers and colleagues are extending an approach used to study air pollution in the U.S. They are developing methods to estimate exposures—from dust and sand storms and other sources—for U.S. troops who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. The work to date is reported in three related studies, two now online in the *Journal of the Air and Waste Management Association* and one pending publication. The goal is to build reliable tools for epidemiologists trying to tease out the links between respiratory health and exposure to air pollution, especially in areas of the world where American troops are deployed but that lack air-quality monitoring networks like those in the U.S. VA funded the research as a pilot to lay the groundwork for a larger study, under the auspices of VA's Cooperative Studies Program, to assess the lung health of 4,500 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. The study, expected to be launched in 2017, is titled "Pulmonary Health and Deployment to Southwest Asia and Afghanistan." [Phys.org](#)

## Sleep problems persist after PTSD treatment, study of active troops finds

9 December - Sleep disturbance is one of the most common issues individuals with PTSD face. Specifically, insomnia and nightmares plague the vast majority of those struggling with the disorder. ... [A new study found] insomnia was the most frequently reported PTSD symptom prior to treatment. A whopping 92 percent acknowledged some degree of difficulty falling or staying asleep. Although not as high as insomnia, 69 percent of the same group reported suffering from nightmares. ... [A]pproximately three-fourths of service members still reported insomnia as a problem after PTSD treatment. And around half still struggled with nightmares. [Military Times](#)

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**DoD Unveils  
Redesigned  
National Resource  
Directory**

The National Resource Directory ([www.nrd.gov](http://www.nrd.gov)), a website that provides access to services and resources at the national, state and local levels, unveiled an updated design and layout this week. The updates were implemented to make the site more user-friendly for the thousands of service members, veterans and family members who use the Directory each month.



## Telemedicine for PTSD no less effective than in-person therapy

13 December - Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who have difficulties making it to in-person therapy sessions may be able to get treatment that's just as good by videoconference. Researchers compared home-delivered prolonged exposure therapy - which helps patients confront memories and situations that trigger their symptoms - to the same treatment given in U.S. Veterans Affairs clinics, and found no difference in effectiveness. "The best treatment for PTSD, with the most empirical support, can be delivered at no loss of effectiveness, directly into a veteran's home, rather than having the veteran come into clinic," lead study author Ron Acierno told Reuters Health by email.

[Reuters](#)

## The U.S. Navy hopes a reporting app can reduce sexual assault

10 December - In a bid to curb on-duty sexual assault between servicemen and women, the naval warfare branch of the US armed forces is placing its bets on a smartphone app. The US Navy is investing \$150,000 into a six-month pilot project to test an app called LiveSafe. ... Users can send in text, photographs, or video—anononymously, or with their name and contact info, if they choose (the platform also doesn't store any of that data). Navy personnel are often reluctant to file complaints of assault because, in large part because historically there's been nothing to gain by doing so. ... The focus group for the trial, junior-enlisted sailors, can also send their location to a friend if they're walking home late and the friend can virtually "walk home" with them by tracking their moves on the app. If someone doesn't reach their destination in a timely manner, LiveSafe will alert their emergency contact. [Defense One](#)

## Veterans endure higher pain severity than nonveterans

13 December - American veterans experience higher prevalence of pain and more severe pain than nonveterans, with young and middle-aged veterans suffering the most, according to a new analysis. ... "Our analysis showed that veterans were about 40 percent more likely to experience severe pain than nonveterans," said [the] lead author of the analysis. "As well, younger veterans were substantially more likely to report suffering from severe pain than nonveterans, even after controlling for underlying demographic characteristics. These findings suggest that more attention should be paid to helping veterans manage the impact of severe pain and related disability on daily activities." The analysis is based on data from the 2010-2014 NHIS, in which 67,696 adults (6,647 veterans and 61,049 nonveterans) responded to questions about the persistence and intensity of self-reported pain during the three months prior to the survey. The majority of veteran participants were men (92.5 percent), while the majority of nonveteran participants were women (56.5 percent). [NIH](#)

## Year in Review: MHS stepped up measures against antibiotic resistant bacteria

6 December - The past year brought significant advances in identifying bacteria that can resist current antibiotics. ... [The] Multidrug Resistant Organism Repository and Surveillance Network (MRSN) at WRAIR was the first to discover a gene from a human patient within the United States that is resistant even to a last-resort antibiotic. Colistin is often the final line of defense to treat patients with multidrug resistant infections. The colistin-resistant gene was discovered in samples sent to the MRSN. ... The information is also being shared with the larger scientific community. ... In addition, researchers at the MRSN use the information they've gathered to help with outbreak investigations. Such study spurred changes in infection control practices and provided health care personnel with more information on some of the circulating strains within facilities. [Health.mil](#)

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### GLOBAL

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## Behold a robot hand with a soft touch



11 December - Robotics researchers at Cornell University made a hand that has something close to a human touch — it can not only touch delicate items but also sense the shape and texture of what it comes into contact with. Such a soft robot hand is a step forward for the growing field of soft robotics — the kind of technology that's already used in warehouses to handle food or

other products. But it also holds promise for better prosthetics, robots to interact directly with people or with fragile objects, or robots to squeeze into tight spaces. ... [I]n the past, for a robotic hand to sense what it's holding or touching, it had to be made of something that can conduct electricity, like metal. Now, it just has to be something that can conduct light. [NPR](#)

## Breastmilk, semen carry Ebola virus for extended periods

12 December - An international group ... said a 9-month-old who died of Ebola in Guinea after her parents showed no signs of the illness likely contracted the virus through her mother's breastmilk. Both the mother's milk and the father's semen tested positive for Ebola virus. The child represented the first case of Ebola in the area where she was living in 42 days, and no known epidemiologic contacts could be found. Genetic testing revealed that both parents carried the virus but reported being asymptomatic. ... In related study, ... researchers studied 26 male Ebola survivors to measure how long Ebola stayed in their reproductive tracts post-infection. They found Ebola virus RNA in semen samples up to 407

### Health Affairs

The December issue of Health Affairs contains several articles on oral health.



**Cerebral malaria:  
NIH video reveals  
cause of death in  
mice brains**

Using state-of-the-art brain imaging technology, scientists at the National Institutes of Health filmed what happens in the brains of mice that developed cerebral malaria (CM). The results reveal the processes that lead to fatal outcomes of the disease and suggest an antibody therapy that may treat it.



days after disease onset (median, 158 days). Using statistical analysis, they predicted that 90% of men will clear Ebola virus from their semen within 294 days of disease onset.

[CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

## Daily chlorhexidine bathing may cut MRSA, VRE

9 December - Daily bathing of patients with chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) appears to reduce hospital-related methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus* (VRE). ... Investigators in Vancouver conducted a prospective crossover study on four medical units that each contained 25 beds and were separated from each other from May 1, 2014, to Aug 10, 2015. Half the patients were bathed daily with no-rinse CHG cloths for 7 months, while the control group received soap-and-water baths. Each cohort involved more than 17,500 patient-days. Compliance with daily CHG bathing was 58%. Hospital-associated MRSA decreased 55% ... and VRE dropped 36% ... compared with control patients. There was no significant difference in rates of hospital-associated *C difficile*. [CIDRAP ASP Scan](#) (third item)

## DNA in wastewater could provide clues to help community health, researchers say

12 December - With every toilet flush, valuable information encrypted in DNA is lost. Wastewater may hold a wealth of insight for public health officials, and an interdisciplinary team of Stanford researchers is keen on tapping into it. Currently, disease response is reactive; doctors and public health specialists can't do much until patients report their symptoms. Even then, new and elusive pathogens escape early detection. Looking at the bugs in our waste, however, could speed up disease tracking. ... The researchers will look for pathogen DNA from a menu of bacteria and viruses, and will also keep an eye out for new and unexpected critters. They hope their project will reveal the broad diversity of microbes in our waste. The research could also validate their tools as way to rapidly track the disease-causing bugs. [Phys.org](#)

## Finding the world's unknown viruses — before they find us

13 December - One by one, the viruses have slipped from their hiding places in nature to threaten global populations — SARS, MERS, Zika. In each case, scientists have scrambled to identify the viruses and to develop vaccines or drugs to stop their spread. After each crisis, the assessment has been the same: Countermeasures were not ready in time to help in the containment effort. "Always too late," said Jonna Mazet, a scientist at the University of California, Davis, who is keen to break the bugs' winning streak. "We need to think about something different." Mazet is a key player in an ambitious endeavor called the Global Virome Project, which has proposed cataloguing nearly all of the unknown viruses lurking in nature around the world. The idea has been around for a while and is supported by individual scientists and organizations. ... Now support for a global push may be picking up momentum, as scientists and health organizations find themselves repeatedly called upon

## 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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## 'Gender-biased infections' may exist

14 December - The report, published in Nature Communications, argues there is a benefit to a virus "going easy" in women as it helps it spread. ... Viruses have ways of spreading that are unique to women - such as to a child in the womb, during birth or breastfeeding. Scientists at Royal Holloway University in London used mathematics to model whether this altered the way viruses behaved. Their findings suggest there may be an advantage to infections being less aggressive in women as reducing the risk of killing the mother increases the chance of infecting the child. ... "We show theoretically it is possible, which is challenging, but we haven't proven what the mechanism is that would trigger this difference. [BBC News](#)

## Global, regional, and national cancer incidence, mortality, years of life lost, years lived with disability, and disability-adjusted life-years for 32 cancer groups

3 December - ... In 2015, there were 17.5 million cancer cases worldwide and 8.7 million deaths. Between 2005 and 2015, cancer cases increased by 33%, with population aging contributing 16%, population growth 13%, and changes in age-specific rates contributing 4%. For men, the most common cancer globally was prostate cancer (1.6 million cases). Tracheal, bronchus, and lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer deaths and DALYs in men (1.2 million deaths and 25.9 million DALYs). For women, the most common cancer was breast cancer (2.4 million cases). Breast cancer was also the leading cause of cancer deaths and DALYs for women (523 000 deaths and 15.1 million DALYs). [The JAMA Network](#)

## Graphene-spiked silly putty picks up human pulse

9 December - A dash of graphene can transform the stretchy goo known as Silly Putty into a pressure sensor able to monitor a human pulse or even track the dainty steps of a small spider. The material, dubbed G-putty, could be developed into a device that continuously monitors blood pressure, its inventors hope. ... The researchers mixed graphene flakes, roughly 20 atomic layers thick and up to 800 nanometers long, with homemade Silly Putty, a silicone polymer, to produce dark grey G-putty that conducted electricity. Crucially, its electrical resistance changed dramatically when the researchers applied even tiny amounts of pressure. ... When they wired up a lump of G-putty and held it to a student's neck, the pulse from his carotid artery was clearly visible in those resistance changes. In fact, the pulse profile was so detailed that they could convert it into an accurate blood-pressure reading. The sensor could also monitor respiration when placed on the student's chest.

[Scientific American](#)

## Liver cancer is becoming a top killer in poor countries

9 December - The number of new cancer cases grew worldwide to 17.5 million in 2015 from

13.1 million in 2005. And the fastest growth is in some of the world's poorest countries. ... That's an unfortunate consequence of public health success in reducing childhood deaths and controlling diseases like tuberculosis and AIDS. People in poor countries are living longer — long enough to get cancer. One cancer that is common in poor countries — and not so common in wealthier countries — is liver cancer. ... There are several causes, so the risks vary in different countries. They include infection with hepatitis B or hepatitis C, alcoholism, and, in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa and China, aflatoxin, which is a toxin produced by mold that can grow on rice or corn that's stored inappropriately. In Mongolia, which traditionally has a very high rate of liver cancer, there are many cases of both hepatitis B and C as well as high rates of alcoholism. Thailand also has a high rate of liver cancer, but it's a less common type caused by exposure to liver fluke, a parasite found in fresh water. Eating raw fish is primarily the way people are exposed. [NPR](#)

## Longer use of pain relievers associated with hearing loss in women

14 December - as many as two-thirds of women in the United States over the age of 60 have some degree of hearing loss. Using data from the Nurses' Health Study, a team led by researchers from Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) has found evidence that the duration of use of over-the-counter medications for pain relief, including ibuprofen or acetaminophen, is associated with higher risk of hearing loss. The new study, published today in the American Journal of Epidemiology, adds to a growing body of evidence linking the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or acetaminophen with loss of hearing, although the exact mechanism at play remains unknown. [Harvard Gazette](#)

## Will viruses save us from superbugs?

8 December - ... [B]acteriophages, or phages, are the viruses that devour bacteria. ... Phages slip through sticky biofilms, infect their targets, and tidily eliminate offending bacteria and themselves, leaving a patient's microbiome untouched. Their unique method of action could allow phages to become powerful weapons in the war against superbugs. [Nautilus](#)

## Why doctors still worry about measles

12 December - ... [A] study presented in October suggested that one of the most feared later complications of measles is actually more common than we knew. ... Researchers reviewed all the cases in California from 1998 to 2016 of subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE), a degenerative brain disease which occurs years after measles infection, but is still clearly linked to the virus and the body's reaction to it. They found that those children who had had measles at less than 12 months old had a much higher risk of developing this fatal complication than had previously been reported. ... When they extrapolated out from the relationship between the cases of measles and the cases of SSPE, they found that for children under a year, the rate was 1 in 600. ... [For] the population of children whose parents refused the vaccine a couple of decades ago; measles can be a bad

disease in children, but it can be even more dangerous in young adults. ... If there's another outbreak some years down the line, we may have many more unvaccinated adults. "It won't affect how you start the fire, but how long that fire burns in the community may be very different," he said. [The New York Times](#)

## ZIKA VIRUS

### Birth defects seen in 6 percent of Zika pregnancies: U.S. study

14 December - Roughly six percent of women in the United States who were infected with the Zika virus during pregnancy had fetuses or babies with birth defects, U.S. researchers reported on Wednesday. Of the 442 women in a U.S. Zika registry who had completed their pregnancies, 26 of their babies had one or more birth defect thought to be linked with Zika infection during pregnancy. ... A total of 18 of the fetuses or babies had microcephaly, meaning an abnormally small-sized head, which often signifies arrested brain development. Once considered a mild, mosquito-borne infection, Zika has been linked with thousands of cases of birth defects in Brazil and elsewhere. [Reuters](#)

### CDC issues Zika virus guidance for Brownsville, Texas

14 December - CDC has issued Zika-related travel and testing guidance for Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas, following reports from Texas public health officials of five cases spread locally by mosquitoes. This information suggests that there may be a risk of continued spread of Zika virus and therefore pregnant women are at some risk for Zika virus infection. CDC is designating the city of Brownsville as a Zika cautionary area (yellow area). Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS), Cameron County Health Department, Brownsville Health Department and CDC are working together to rapidly learn more about the extent of Zika virus transmission in Brownsville. [CDC](#)

### Colombia reports major rise in birth defect amid Zika crisis

10 December - Colombia, which suffered a Zika epidemic that peaked in February, has reported four times as many cases of babies born with microcephaly this year as it did in 2015, providing more proof that the Zika virus causes brain damage in infants. ... With 105,000 suspected Zika cases, Colombia has had the second-largest Zika epidemic after Brazil. ... As of Thursday, Brazil had reported 2,211 cases of microcephaly in which Zika infection had been confirmed to the World Health Organization, while Colombia had reported only 60. [The New York Times](#)

### Zika linked to hearing and vision complications in adults

8 December - ... In a new study ... Brazilian researchers detailed three cases of acute, transient hearing loss in adults who were infected with Zika virus. All patients were admitted

to an ear, nose, and throat emergency department in the summer of 2015. One patient had laboratory-confirmed Zika, and the other two were probably infected with the flavivirus. These are the first cases of acute hearing losses described during the current epidemic that began in Brazil. ... Another study ... described a case of bilateral posterior uveitis, or eye tissue inflammation, in a 26-year-old American man who was infected with Zika after traveling to Puerto Rico. [CIDRAP](#)

## Zika virus can keep growing in infant brains even after birth

13 December - U.S. researchers have found evidence of the Zika virus replicating in fetal brains for up to seven months after the mother became infected with the virus, and they showed the virus can persist even after birth, according to a study published on Tuesday. The findings confirm earlier observations from case studies suggesting that the mosquito-borne Zika virus can grow in fetal brains and women's placentas. "Our findings show that Zika virus can continue to replicate in infants' brains even after birth, and that the virus can persist in placentas for months – much longer than we expected," Julu Bhatnagar, lead of the molecular pathology team at CDC's Infectious Diseases Pathology Branch and the study's lead author, said in a statement. The findings help explain how the virus causes devastating birth defects and pregnancy losses even if a woman had only a minor illness. [Reuters](#)

## Zika virus infection in pregnant women in Rio de Janeiro

15 December - A total of 345 women were enrolled from September 2015 through May 2016; of these, 182 women (53%) tested positive for ZIKV in blood, urine, or both. The timing of acute ZIKV infection ranged from 6 to 39 weeks of gestation. Predominant maternal clinical features included a pruritic descending macular or maculopapular rash, arthralgias, conjunctival injection, and headache; 27% had fever (short-term and low-grade). By July 2016, a total of 134 ZIKV-affected pregnancies and 73 ZIKV-unaffected pregnancies had reached completion, with outcomes known for 125 ZIKV-affected and 61 ZIKV-unaffected pregnancies. Infection with chikungunya virus was identified in 42% of women without ZIKV infection versus 3% of women with ZIKV infection ( $P < 0.001$ ). Rates of fetal death were 7% in both groups; overall adverse outcomes were 46% among offspring of ZIKV-positive women versus 11.5% among offspring of ZIKV-negative women ( $P < 0.001$ ). Among 117 live infants born to 116 ZIKV-positive women, 42% were found to have grossly abnormal clinical or brain imaging findings or both, including 4 infants with microcephaly. Adverse outcomes were noted regardless of the trimester during which the women were infected with ZIKV (55% of pregnancies had adverse outcomes after maternal infection in the first trimester, 52% after infection in the second trimester, and 29% after infection in the third trimester). [The New England Journal of Medicine](#)

## Zika zones end in Florida as Texas reports 4 new cases

9 December - ... At a media briefing in Miami Beach today, Florida Gov. Rick Scott

announced that the final Zika transmission zone has been lifted, a 1.5-square-mile area of South Miami Beach, the *Miami Herald* reported. ... Meanwhile, the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS) and county health officials announced four more suspected locally acquired cases in Cameron County, all affecting people who live in Brownsville very close to the first case-patient from the state. Investigations are ongoing, but the TDSHS said the patients were likely exposed to Zika in the immediate area. [CIDRAP](#)

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## **INFLUENZA**

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### **APHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report**

For the week ending 3 December 2016 (Week 48)

Influenza activity has remained relatively low for the current season, with a decrease in the percentage of influenza A positive specimens in Army MTFs over the past week. In the US civilian populations, influenza-like illness (ILI) activity increased.

- **ILI Activity:** Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 48 were less than 1% lower than the same week last year.
- **Influenza cases:** One hospitalized influenza-associated case was reported to APHC through DRSiin week 48. Three cases have been reported so far this season.
- **Viral specimens:** During week 48, 81 of 809 (10%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-P reported most (40%) of the influenza A-positive specimens, followed by RHC-C (33%), and RHC-A (27%). RHC-E and CENTCOM did not report any positive specimens. [APHC](#)

### **CDC: Flu View - Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report**

During week 48 (November 27 - December 3, 2016), influenza activity increased slightly, but remained low in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus subtype reported by public health laboratories during week 48 was influenza A (H3). The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories remained low.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** Due to data processing problems, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) mortality surveillance data for the week ending November 19, 2016 (week 46) will not be published this week. [CDC](#)

### **ECDC: Flu News Europe**

Week 48/2016 (28 November–4 December 2016)

- Influenza activity remained low, but has started to increase in some countries.

- The proportion of virus detections among sentinel surveillance specimens increased to 19% and indicates increasing regional activity.
- The majority of influenza viruses detected for this week were subtype A(H3N2).
- Laboratory-confirmed influenza cases from hospital settings are increasing in some countries. [European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO](#)

## Puerto Rico declares influenza epidemic

12 December - Puerto Rican Health Department Secretary Ana Rius declared an influenza epidemic on the island last week due to the island experiencing a rapid increase in cases nearing 10,000, according to a Yahoo Noticias report (computer translated). To date, 9,591 cases have been reported this season. [Outbreak News Today](#)

## USAFSAM & DHA: DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During 27 November - 10 December 2016 (Surveillance Weeks 48 & 49), a total of 183 specimens were collected from 41 locations. Results were finalized for 146 specimens from 38 locations. During Week 48, one influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, 10 influenza A(H3N2), and one influenza B were identified. During Week 49, 12 influenza A(H3N2) were identified. Approximately 11% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 48. Approximately 17% of specimens tested positive for influenza during Week 49. The influenza percent positive for the season is approximately 5%.

[US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine & Defense Health Agency](#)

## U.S. flu vaccine coverage about 40% early in the flu season

9 December - About 40% of people in the United States had received a flu vaccine by early November, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said today. ... The percentage of those receiving the vaccine is about the same as it was this time last year, the CDC said in the first of its two reports. By age-group, vaccine uptake by early November was 39.8% overall, 37.3% in children, and 40.6% in adults. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

## WHO: Influenza Update

12 December - Influenza activity in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere increased slightly. [WHO](#)

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## Carrageenan backlash: Food firms are ousting a popular additive

12 December - ... A committee that proposes rules for the organic food industry just voted to ban [carrageenan] from organic products. The shift is driven by pressure from activist groups that believe, based on a handful of studies, that carrageenan is linked to health problems. ... Its use has soared in the past few decades. Ask estimates that 5,000 tons of seaweed was harvested for carrageenan production in 1970. Today, it's more than 200,000 tons. According to a report from the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization, global carrageenan use increased more than five-fold from 2000 to 2010. ... A few scientists have reported that carrageenan has caused intestinal inflammation in laboratory animals. ... Other scientists say that they tried to confirm those laboratory results and failed. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, as well as the European Commission and the World Health Organization, say that they still believe carrageenan is safe. [NPR](#)

## Celebrity chef's food safety habits need improvement: Study

14 December - Celebrity chefs are cooking up poor food safety habits, according to a Kansas State University study. ... The researchers viewed 100 cooking shows with 24 popular celebrity chefs and found several unclean food preparation behaviors. "Twenty-three percent of chefs licked their fingers; that's terrible," said Chambers, professor and director of the Sensory Analysis Center at Kansas State University. "Twenty percent touched their hair or dirty clothing or things and then touched food again." The chefs' most common food safety hazards included lack of hand-washing, not changing the cutting boards between raw meat and vegetables that wouldn't be cooked, and not using a meat thermometer to check meat doneness. [Outbreak News Today](#)

## FSIS issues public health alert for possibly undercooked ready-to-eat chicken products

9 December – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is alerting consumers that recalled ready-to-eat (RTE) chicken products produced by National Steak and Poultry, a Owasso, Okla. Establishment P-6010T, have been used or incorporated into other FSIS-regulated products. FSIS does not have confidence in the safety of any subsequently produced products that have used or incorporated the chicken products that were previously recalled by National Steak and Poultry on Nov. 23, 2016, with an expanded recall occurring on Dec. 4, 2016. [USDA](#)

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## Drinking, drug use largely down among U.S. teens in 2016

13 December - The use of alcohol, marijuana, prescription medications and illicit substances declined among U.S. teens again in 2016, continuing a long-term trend, according to a study released on Tuesday by the National Institutes of Health. But the research found that high school seniors were still using cannabis at nearly the same levels as in 2015, with 22.5 percent saying that had smoked or ingested the drug at least once within the past month and 6 percent reporting daily use. ... The annual survey, part of a series called Monitoring the Future which has tracked drug, alcohol and tobacco use among teens since 1975, also found that during 2016 there was a higher use of pot among 12th graders in states with medical marijuana laws. [Reuters](#)

## French add to U.S. concerns about Bayer contraceptive implant

9 December - Women in France who have used Bayer's contraceptive implant Essure have launched a legal complaint about side-effects similar to a challenge already underway in the United States. A Bayer spokeswoman declined to comment on litigation in France but said the company remained convinced that the implant was a good option for many women and that it offered a positive risk-benefit profile. Thousands of complaints about the device in the United States in March prompted regulators to put the strongest safety warning label on the product and ask for a post-market study. ... The company said in its third-quarter report that U.S. lawsuits from approximately 3,000 Essure users were pending. French newspaper Le Parisien, which earlier reported the lawsuits, said some 120,000 women had been using the device in France since 2002 and that reported side effects had included depression, dizziness or uterine perforation. [Reuters](#)

## Keep it moving

9 December - ... People who work out but also sit for long hours — active couch potatoes, you might say — may often share the same elevated risks for disease and early death as their less active peers. ... [R]esearchers from the University of Texas at Austin asked seven healthy young male volunteers to wear monitors and spend four active days in a row and four sedentary days in a row. When active, the subjects walked as often as they could, averaging more than 17,000 daily steps, and ended up sitting for a total of roughly eight hours a day on average; when sedentary, they sat for 14 hours or so. ... In one of their earlier studies, the researchers found that this workout leads to a healthful reduction of triglycerides. ... And indeed, when the men were regularly active and ran, their bodies reproduced this same healthful effect. But when the men instead sat for 14 hours a day, running did not bring down the high levels of triglycerides in their blood.

[The New York Times](#)

## New York ‘zombie’ outbreak shows value of predicting future designer drugs

14 December - Researchers in California say they have found a faster method for identifying designer drugs similar to one that caused a "zombie" outbreak on a Brooklyn, New York block this summer. The method, outlined in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, could make it easier for officials to quickly outlaw a synthetic drug and law enforcement officials to get it off the street. It involves developing a catalog of potential drugs before they hit the black market, making identification faster. "The way to respond to designer drug intoxication requires a totally different approach that may not necessarily be available to ordinary clinical labs," said senior author Roy Gerona of the University of California, San Francisco. The development is part of an ongoing race by chemists to develop powerful new mind-bending drugs before officials can outlaw them. [Reuters](#)

## One weight-loss approach fits all? No, not even close

12 December - Dr. Frank Sacks, a professor of nutrition at Harvard, likes to challenge his audience when he gives lectures on obesity. "If you want to make a great discovery," he tells them, figure out this: Why do some people lose 50 pounds on a diet while others on the same diet gain a few pounds? Then he shows them data from a study he did that found exactly that effect. ... Two people can have the same amount of excess weight, they can be the same age, the same socioeconomic class, the same race, the same gender. And yet a treatment that works for one will do nothing for the other. The problem, researchers say, is that obesity and its precursor — being overweight — are not one disease but instead, like cancer, they are many. [The New York Times](#)

## Why vitamin pills don't work, and may be bad for you

8 December - ... There are some studies that do show benefits of taking antioxidants, especially when the population sampled doesn't have access to a healthy diet. But, according a review from 2012 that noted the conclusions of 27 clinical trials assessing the efficacy of a variety of antioxidants, the weight of evidence does not fall in its favour. Just seven studies reported that supplementation led to some sort of health benefit from antioxidant supplements, including reduced risk of coronary heart disease and pancreatic cancer. Ten studies didn't see any benefit at all – it was as if all patients were given the sugar pill also (but, of course, they weren't). That left another 10 studies that found many patients to be in a measurably worse state after being administered antioxidants than before, including an increased incidence of diseases such as lung and breast cancer. ... From start to finish, a healthy immune response depends on free radicals being there for us, within us. As geneticists Joao Pedro Magalhaes and George Church wrote in 2006: "In the same way that fire is dangerous and nonetheless humans learned how to use it, it now appears that cells evolved mechanisms to control and use [free radicals]." [BBC News](#)

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## Africa: Malaria control improves for vulnerable in Africa, but global progress off-track

13 December - WHO's [World Malaria Report 2016](#) reveals that children and pregnant women in sub-Saharan Africa have greater access to effective malaria control. Across the region, a steep increase in diagnostic testing for children and preventive treatment for pregnant women has been reported over the last 5 years. Among all populations at risk of malaria, the use of insecticide-treated nets has expanded rapidly. ... Sub-Saharan Africa carries a disproportionately high share of the global malaria burden. In 2015, the region was home to 90% of malaria cases and 92% of malaria deaths. Children under five years of age are particularly vulnerable, accounting for an estimated 70% of all malaria deaths. [WHO](#)

## Ivory Coast: Ivory Coast is latest to crack down on alcohol sachets

11 December - Each morning at dawn, taxi driver Rene Kouame stops by his neighborhood bar in Abidjan for a potent pick-me-up: two plastic sachets of "Che Guevara," a drink of spiced rum and a host of chemicals that costs 100 CFA francs, or about 15 U.S. cents. With an alcohol by volume figure of 43 percent, the 2-ounce sachets are about as intoxicating as a typical 16-ounce beer. ... From now on, however, Ivory Coast's government wants Kouame to get his courage elsewhere. Last month, officials announced a ban on alcohol sachets, citing their health risks and the need to combat alcoholism, especially among youth. The measure is one of more than a half-dozen bans or partial bans on alcohol sachets in effect in sub-Saharan Africa. [AP](#)

## Nigeria: A third of health facilities in Nigeria's insurgency-hit Borno state destroyed: WHO

14 December - A third of 743 health facilities have been destroyed in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, the area worst hit in a seven-year insurgency by Islamist Boko Haram militants, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday. The jihadist group has killed 15,000 people and displaced more than two million from their homes during its attempt to create a "caliphate" in the northeast of Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and biggest energy producer. Nigerian military forces backed by troops from neighboring states have, in the last few months, ousted Boko Haram from most of an area the size of Belgium that they controlled until early 2015, revealing thousands living in famine-like conditions. [Reuters](#)

## Somalia: Measles outbreak poses new threat to children in Somalia

12 December 2016 – The cholera treatment centre at Kismayo General Hospital, the biggest hospital in Kismayo, hadn't had any patients since the last outbreak was brought under

control. But lately it has again been inundated with patients. This time, the outbreak is measles. ... Since September, 419 measles cases have been officially recorded, 302 of which are children under five. In Somalia, measles is a major cause of death among children – but it can be effectively prevented with a simple vaccine. [ReliefWeb](#)

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## **USCENTCOM**

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### **Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia reports more MERS cases; WHO updates risk assessment**

12 December - Saudi Arabia's ministry of health (MOH) reported two new MERS-CoV cases over the weekend, and the World Health Organization (WHO) issued an updated risk assessment for the virus, its first since July 2015, noting that experts are still deeply concerned about continuing healthcare spread, though the outbreaks are smaller and stopped relatively quickly. In other Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) developments, South Korean researchers recently published their analysis of transmission patterns during the country's large hospital outbreak, which showed a connection between super-spreading events, doctor shopping, and emergency department visits. [CIDRAP](#)

### **Syria: Aleppo health workers witness the worst day of their lives**

12 December – As the violence in Syria intensifies, civilians and health workers continue to pay the highest price. Today, Aleppo is the most dangerous city in the world. Tens of innocent men, women and children have been killed or injured, and thousands more have been forced to flee for safety. Health workers who choose to stay behind are overwhelmed, exhausted and working with limited resources. Risking their lives daily to save others, they work under the most stressful and challenging conditions. For some, the suffering becomes personal, as they receive news about the loss of family and loved ones while on duty.

[ReliefWeb](#)

### **Yemen: Cholera cases continue to climb in Yemen**

9 December - The World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday there are 1,245 more cholera cases in Yemen this week, bringing the total number of suspected cases to 8,975. There were also 7 more deaths, bringing that total to 89. ... [T]he recent spike of cases has strained the country's public health infrastructure. The WHO said it is supporting the country through health education campaigns and providing essential medical supplies, including intravenous fluids and water chlorination tablets. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (fifth item)

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## ECDC report warns of rising threat from carbapenem-resistant *A baumannii*

14 December - European health officials are warning about an increase in carbapenem-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* infections in hospitals across the continent. In a rapid risk assessment issued Dec 8, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said recent data from the European survey on carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (EuSCAPE) and the European Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance Network (EARS-Net) confirm that although there is already a high resistance baseline in some EU countries, there's been an overall increase in carbapenem-resistant *A baumannii* throughout the continent. [CIDRAP Stewardship/Resistance Scan](#) (first item)

## Sweden no longer rabies free: Researchers

14 December - Researchers from Folkhälsomyndigheten (Sweden's Public Health) and Uppsala University are reporting that rabid bats are present in the southern areas of the country, saying Sweden is no longer rabies free. They studied and analyzed saliva and blood samples from bats over six years and found that of the 450+ bats tested, 14 had rabies specific antibodies in their blood. This indicates the bats had been exposed to the virus at some time. All saliva samples tested negative. [Outbreak News Today](#)

## United Kingdom/Spain: Britons in Spain fret over health care, may come home after Brexit

14 December - ... Britons retiring to Spain are attracted not only by a warm climate and Mediterranean lifestyle but also by free access to a well-regarded health system, with London ultimately picking up the bill by refunding Madrid for their health costs. It is unclear if that EU-mandated arrangement will continue as the issue is likely to become tangled in divorce negotiations set to begin by March. Pensioners meanwhile worry they may have to return to Britain's stretched health system, another example of unintended Brexit consequences rippling across Europe. A return of ailing pensioners to Britain would threaten to further strain its National Health Service (NHS) where patients can wait for hours in hospital corridors before they are treated - not an outcome envisaged by Brexit campaigners. [Reuters](#)

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## U.S.: Bill Gates leads new fund as fears of U.S. retreat on climate grow

12 December - ... Mr. Gates, the billionaire co-founder of Microsoft, announced on Monday the start of a fund to invest in transformative energy research and development to reduce the emissions that cause climate change. The work would supplement and build on basic research already underway at government labs that may be threatened by the incoming administration. Despite Mr. Trump's expressed skepticism about climate change and his appointment of fossil fuel advocates to his cabinet, Mr. Gates said he expected the president-elect to recognize that government funding of basic research would eventually be good for business, jobs, infrastructure and other economic elements that Mr. Trump campaigned on. [The New York Times](#)

## U.S.: EPA says fracking harms drinking water in some circumstances

13 December - Fracking for oil and natural gas can contaminate drinking water under "some circumstances," the Environmental Protection Agency said in a report released Tuesday, which changes a previous finding that the drilling process does not cause "widespread, systemic" effects. The final report from the agency concludes more than five years of research and backs down from its previous determination that fracking is not a systemic threat to drinking water nationwide. EPA science adviser Thomas Burke said there were significant gaps in data that limited the agency's ability to examine effects on drinking water both locally and nationally. Despite not giving a definitive answer about the impact of fracking on drinking water, Burke said the report offered the most comprehensive record of scientific data on the relationship. [Scientific American](#)

## U.S.: FDA takes steps to improve hearing aid accessibility

7 December - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration today announced important steps to better support consumer access to hearing aids. The agency issued a guidance document explaining that it does not intend to enforce the requirement that individuals 18 and up receive a medical evaluation or sign a waiver prior to purchasing most hearing aids. This guidance is effective immediately. Today, the FDA is also announcing its commitment to consider creating a category of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids that could deliver new, innovative and lower-cost products to millions of consumers. ... The guidance is "Immediately in Effect," which means it is implemented without prior public comment because it presents a less burdensome policy that is consistent with public health. [FDA](#)

## U.S.: Hearing loss prevalence declining in U.S. adults aged 20 to 69 years

15 December - Hearing loss among U.S. adults aged 20 to 69 has declined over the last decade, even as the number of older Americans continues to grow. These findings ... confirm that hearing loss is strongly associated with age and other demographic factors such as sex, race/ethnicity, and education. Noise exposure, which is potentially preventable, was also significant but less strongly associated after adjustment for other factors. ... [R]esearchers compared hearing health data collected as part of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) (link is external) over two time periods: 2011–2012 and 1999–2004. ... The researchers found that the overall annual prevalence of hearing loss dropped slightly, from 16 percent to 14 percent, or 28 million adults, in the 1999–2004 period versus 27.7 million in the 2011–2012 period. This decline in absolute numbers was observed despite an increase in the population generally, and in the relative number of adults aged 50 to 69 in the more recent time period. [NIH](#)

## U.S.: HHS awards \$1 billion contract for anthrax preparedness through 2021

12 December - The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced it was giving \$1 billion to Emergent BioSolutions to supply the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) with 29 million doses of BioThrax, an anthrax vaccine, through September of 2021. BioThrax is the only Food and Drug Administration–approved anthrax vaccine that's licensed for use both pre- and post-exposure to *Bacillus anthracis*, which causes anthrax and can be used as a biological weapon. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (third item)

## U.S.: HHS report highlights drop in hospital-acquired conditions

14 December - A new report from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) shows that hospital-acquired conditions (HACs) are continuing to decline, a finding that has positive implications for the battle against antibiotic resistance. According to the National Scorecard on Rates of Hospital-Acquired Conditions, a report compiled and analyzed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), preliminary estimates for 2015 show a 21% decline in HACs since 2010. That translates into a cumulative total of 3.1 million fewer HAC's over 5 years than would have occurred had rates remained at the 2010 level, 125,000 fewer deaths, and approximately \$28 billion in healthcare savings. [CIDRAP Stewardship/Resistance Scan](#) (second item)

## U.S.: U.S. mumps cases at highest level in 10 years

13 December – The United States is being hit with the most mumps cases in a decade, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The latest tally as of November 5 is 2,879 cases in 45 states and the District of Columbia. ... To respond to this

year's high numbers, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices ... is considering recommendation of a third dose of vaccine. It is unclear what age groups this would involve. ... This year, just two outbreaks make up the majority of cases, according to Patel. Arkansas has had about 1,870 cases and in Iowa has had 683 cases, according to state health department data.... "Most of these outbreaks are occurring among vaccinated people," [Dr. Manisha ] Patel said, adding that the CDC and other public health partners are trying to tease out what that means. [CNN](#)

## U.S.: Rise in infant drug dependence is felt most in rural areas

12 December - As the opioid epidemic sweeps through rural America, an ever-greater number of drug-dependent newborns are straining hospital neonatal units and draining precious medical resources. The problem has grown more quickly than realized and shows no signs of abating, researchers reported on Monday. Their study, published in *JAMA Pediatrics*, concludes for the first time that the increase in drug-dependent newborns has been disproportionately larger in rural areas. The rising rates are due largely to widening use of opioids among pregnant women, the researchers found. From 2004 to 2013, the proportion of newborns born dependent on drugs increased nearly sevenfold in hospitals in rural counties, to 7.5 per 1,000 from 1.2 per 1,000. By contrast, the uptick among urban infants was nearly fourfold, to 4.8 per 1,000 from 1.4 per 1,000. [The New York Times](#)

## U.S.: U.S. death rates vary drastically by county

13 December - Death rates - and causes of death - vary widely across the U.S., according to a new study that looked at thousands of individual counties. The county-specific findings, available online, may illuminate areas and issues needing attention, the research team says. "Within any individual county, knowing how big of a problem a condition is" can help counties know which conditions need attention, resources and policies, said the study's lead author. ... [R]ates of death, and causes of death, varied widely. For example, death rates from cardiovascular disease tended to be highest in counties near the southern half of the Mississippi river. Also, death rates from self-harm and interpersonal violence were highest in southwestern counties, while the highest rates of death from chronic respiratory issues were in eastern Kentucky and western Virginia. [Reuters](#)

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### USPACOM

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## China: Smokers chased in Beijing as China considers national law

15 December - ... As China considers a nationwide ban on smoking in public places, the fight is well underway in Beijing, which banned smoking in restaurants and other indoor

areas 18 months ago. Zealous volunteers and anti-smoking advocates have made some headway against millions of occasionally intransigent smokers and the state-run cigarette monopoly, a large and powerful force in China's government and economy. Cigarettes are a cultural symbol in China, where national leaders dating back to Mao Zedong were well-known smokers, and where cigarettes are still handed out commonly at weddings, banquets and holiday celebrations. ... But tobacco extracts a huge cost as well. About 1 million deaths a year in China can be attributed to cigarettes, a figure that could triple by 2050 without greater action to curb the habit. [ABC News](#)

## India: Ganges superbugs are threat to world health



8 December - The River Ganges in India is ... most famous as a place for retirement or cremation. Dr B. D. Tripathi, an environmental and water pollution expert at Banaras Hindu University, estimates 32,000 human corpses are cremated there each year with up to 300 tonnes of half-burnt human flesh released into the

water. ... Heavy metals such as chromium, mercury and lead make up the thick soup of untreated toxic waste that typically pour in from hospitals, chemical plants, hospitals, textile mills and distilleries seated along its banks. ... Further downstream in chaotic Varanasi, ... measurements of the levels of dissolved oxygen in the river water are as low as zero. ... The river has breathed new forms of life recently though, in the form of unwelcome bacteria. In 2008, two water-borne superbugs in New Delhi, NDM-1 and NDM-4 – NDM is short for New Delhi metallo-beta-lactamase – were discovered. So alarming was their rapid spread, more than any other type of antibiotic resistance across the globe, a warning was sparked by the World Health Organization. ... Prime minister Modi has promised a clean-up of the river by October 2019, in time for the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth.

[Raconteur](#)

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**USSOUTHCOM**

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## Colombia: Botched plastic surgeries and misogyny

12 December - In Colombia, more than 350,000 plastic surgeries are performed each year; that is, 978 procedures a day, 40 an hour and three procedures every five minutes. Plastic surgery is one of the most profitable branches of medical services in the country. The demand for cosmetic procedures responds to a massive need, fed by the hyper-sexism of the Colombian society which limits the professional and personal opportunities for women. ... Over the past decades, Colombia gradually became the perfect setting for offering unsafe surgeries, as the government took no serious action against the surgeries and victims felt too afraid to speak out. ... [A]ccording to data from 2015, the Clinic of the Bolivarian

University every month receives three to five women with serious health conditions caused by illegal aesthetic procedures. Despite the threat to public health that such unsafe procedures constitute, the Colombian authorities have been slow to respond. [Al Jazeera](#)

## PAHO reports only 256 new chikungunya cases

12 December - For the third update in a row, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) late last week reported low chikungunya numbers, with only 256 new cases. The previous two updates noted only 231 and 305 new cases, respectively. Countries and territories in the Americas this year have now reported 441,867 suspected, confirmed, and imported cases, according to PAHO's Dec 9 report. ... Many nations, however, are behind in their reporting to PAHO on the disease. Brazil, for example, which has logged about 80% of the cases so far in 2016 and noted more than 100,000 new cases in a catch-up report in early November, has not reported on the latest 3 months' of data. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (fourth item)

## Health Equity Report 2016: Analysis of Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Inequities in Latin America and the Caribbean

9 December - ... This summary report draws on the findings of the *Health Equity Report 2016* to illustrate the health inequities affecting children, women and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean, to provide government policymakers, non-governmental organizations, civil society partners, communities and all others concerned with the rights of children, women and adolescents relevant evidence they need to recognize and reverse those inequities in health. [Relief Web](#)

## Peru: Peruvian activists fight for forcibly sterilized women

14 December - Feminist activists in Peru are fighting a government decision to stop investigating claims by women who say they were forcibly sterilized, arguing that thousands of women deserve to have their cases heard. Some 350,000 women were sterilized in the mid-1990s under a program promoted by former president Alberto Fujimori, who argued a lower birth rate was crucial to eliminating poverty in Peru. Many were sterilized without their knowledge and consent, and those who refused were often threatened with a fine or prison, say activists who view the campaign as one of Peru's biggest human rights scandals. More than 2,000 women have given statements to Peruvian and international rights groups and prosecutors saying they underwent sterilization without being informed or consenting. The government's public prosecutor had opened investigations into the forced sterilizations, the first in 2009 and most recently last year. But last week, the prosecutor opted to close its investigation into complaints by 77 women. Another investigation into more than 2,000 other women was closed this past summer. [Reuters](#)

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