

26 February 2016

# Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center



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**CDC  
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for prevention of  
sexual transmission  
of  
zika virus**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently published recommendations for protecting people against sexual transmission of Zika virus.

As of February 23, 2016, CDC and state public health departments are investigating 14 additional reports of possible sexual transmission of the virus, including several involving pregnant women. While additional investigations are being completed, CDC is issuing this HAN Advisory as a strong reminder to state, local, and US territorial public health departments, clinicians, and the public to be aware of and adhere to current recommendations for preventing sexual transmission of Zika virus, particularly for men with pregnant partners.



## U.S. MILITARY

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### Army's new fitness tests: New details emerge from leadership

19 February - The Army is on the eve of rolling out new MOS-specific, gender-neutral fitness tests, and new details have begun to emerge. The tests "should be good to go by June," said Patrick Murphy, acting Army secretary. ... That plan, and others related to adding women into previously closed military occupational specialties, is contingent on Defense Department approval. While no final decisions have been made, it's unlikely every MOS will get its own fitness test, owing to the impracticality of creating and conducting one for each specialty, Army test-developers said. One solution could involve implementing a single test and creating a tiered scoring system — soldiers with high marks could serve in the most physically demanding jobs, while those who eked out passing grades would have their MOS options restricted. [Army Times](#)

### Army telemedicine pilot targets a familiar pain point: the ER

23 February - The U.S. Army is testing a telemedicine platform that connects non-urgent ER visitors in a Kentucky hospital with doctors at another hospital some 445 miles away. The project, launched on Feb. 2, aims to reduce wait times at Blanchfield Army Community Hospital (BACH) in Fort Campbell and enable the hospital's ER staff to focus on urgent cases. It may eventually lead to the development of a virtual care program for military personnel stationed overseas. ... This project targets two issues that target not only military hospitals but all health systems – a lack of access to timely care for non-urgent issues, and overworked ERs dealing with patients who would be better off seeing a primary care doctor. [mHealth Intelligence](#)

### Camp Minden to burn millions of pounds of explosive material

23 February - A series of explosions at a north Louisiana National Guard complex terrified nearby residents, prompted some evacuations and led authorities to discover 16 million pounds of improperly stored artillery propellant. Now, nearly 3½ years later, the privately contracted cleanup of the site once operated by Explo Systems Inc. is about to begin. The National Guard has hired Explosive Service International based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to burn the dangerous propellant in a special chamber delivered to the site. The Army is paying \$32 million for cleanup. Lt. Col. Pete Schneider says 800 pounds of propellant will be burned at a time. The project will last a year with the burn unit running 24 hours a day, seven days a week, once it's fully operational. [The Gazette](#)

**NIOSH**  
**Ladder Safety**  
**Mobile Application**

The Ladder Safety app, NIOSH's first mobile application, is designed to improve extension and step ladder safety—a concern for those working in construction or any other task that requires ladder use.

Using smart phone technology, the NIOSH Ladder Safety app delivers ladder safety tools, information, reference materials, and training resources into the hands of individual ladder users wherever and whenever they are needed. The app is available in English and Spanish as a free download for Apple iPhone/iPad and Google Android devices.



## Lawmaker to pitch new veterans center for hazardous exposures

24 February - Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., plans to introduce legislation Thursday to create a "center of excellence" to study and manage medical care for veterans with illnesses caused by chemicals and other battlefield environmental hazards. Walz will propose a "Center of Excellence for Toxic Wounds," managed by the Veterans Affairs Department, that would provide a one-stop shop for research initiatives, health care treatment policy and guidance, and specialty care for chronic illnesses linked to exposures resulting from military service. Speaking with the House Veterans' Affairs oversight and investigations subcommittee on Tuesday, Walz said the time has come for VA to consolidate programs on myriad environmental exposures that poison veterans. [Military Times](#)

## Senior medical leaders testify on defense health care reform

24 February - Many successful initiatives are underway to reform the Military Health System, but the system will require change to continue its many benefits to readiness and patient care, military medicine's top leaders told a Senate panel yesterday. ... One such effort addresses reforms for TRICARE, the military's health plan that uses contracted private medical services when military treatment centers are not easily accessible for Defense Department beneficiaries. ... "To ensure readiness, Army medicine must maintain the medical capabilities that are ready to deploy and support our warfighters," Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. (Dr.) Nadja Y. West said. West also serves as commanding general for U.S. Army Medical Command. Improving patient access to care is her priority, she said, adding that she has directed actions to rapidly improve that access. [Department of Defense](#)

## Veterans want past discharges to recognize post-traumatic stress

19 February - ... Since 2001, more than 300,000 people, about 13 percent of all troops, have been forced out of the military with less-than-honorable discharges. Congress has recognized in recent years that some of these discharges were the fault of dysfunctional screening for PTSD and other combat injuries, and it has put safeguards in place to prevent more — including requirements for mental health professionals to review all discharges. In recent years, less than honorable discharges have dropped drastically; and today, troops with PTSD are more likely to be medically discharged with benefits. But that has done little to help those ... who were discharged before the changes. ... [A] small group of veterans are pushing for a bill in Congress that would overhaul the system by mandating that the military give veterans the benefit of the doubt, requiring the boards to decide cases starting from the presumption that PTSD materially contributed to the discharges. [The New York Times](#)

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<http://phc.army.smil.mil>

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

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## GLOBAL

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### Ebola 'devastates long-term health'

25 February - Most people who survive an Ebola infection will have long-lasting health problems, say doctors from the US National Institutes of Health. ... The initial analysis, on 82 survivors, showed most had had severe neurological problems at the height of the infection, including meningitis, hallucinations or falling into a coma. Six months later, new long-term problems had developed. About two-thirds had body weakness, while regular headaches, depressive symptoms and memory loss were found in half of patients. Two of the patients had been actively suicidal at the time of the assessment. ... Meanwhile, data presented earlier ... raised concerns about sexual transmission of the virus in survivors. It indicated 38% of men had tested positive for Ebola in their semen on at least one occasion in the year after recovering. And in the most extreme case, Ebola had been detected 18 months later.

[BBC News](#)

### Evidence on talc cancer risk differs for jurors, researchers

25 February - ... Jurors in St. Louis on Monday ordered Johnson & Johnson to pay \$72 million in damages to the family of a woman who had used the company's talc-based Baby Powder and Shower to Shower for several decades. ... Most of the concern has focused on ... whether women who routinely applied talcum powder on their genitals had an increased risk of ovarian cancer. ... Experts believe it is possible in theory for talc to reach the ovaries by traveling up the vagina, through the uterus and Fallopian tubes and into the ovaries, where it causes inflammation. ... Dr. Daniel Cramer, a Harvard University epidemiologist ... has published several studies since [1982], and his work suggests that talc exposure increases the risk of ovarian cancer, a rare disease, by 30 percent overall. ... Experts said these sorts of studies are less rigorous and prone to bias as women struggle to recall how much or how often they used talcum powder. [Reuters](#)

### Female genital 'nicks' should be legal: gynecologists

22 February - Countries that have banned female genital mutilation (FGM) should allow less invasive practices such as small surgical nicks to girls' genitalia as a compromise, two American gynecologists said on Monday. ... The U.S. gynecologists, writing in the Journal of Medical Ethics, argued that permitting more minimal procedures could allow families to uphold cultural and religious traditions while protecting girls from more dangerous forms of cutting. ... The gynecologists suggested that global attempts to stamp out FGM with legislation had failed and may be driving the practice underground. ... But experts on medical ethics, commenting on the proposal, said procedures to modify girls' genitals could not be compared to male circumcision because they are designed to control women and curb their sexual desire. ... It said FGM prevalence rates had fallen significantly in many

countries and that properly implemented laws had been very effective in countries like Kenya. [Reuters](#)

## ZIKA VIRUS:

### A shocking one-third of Americans believe this Zika conspiracy theory

23 February - Fear and misinformation about the Zika virus still abound, according to a new survey just released by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center. Most notably, the survey finds that more than a third of respondents incorrectly believe that genetically modified mosquitoes have caused the spread of the disease. ... Ninety-one percent of respondents were aware that mosquitoes transmit the virus ... and two-thirds of respondents said they were familiar with news reports about Zika. On the other hand, fewer than half of the participants correctly identified Brazil as the country with the largest current Zika outbreak. Nearly 20 percent of respondents incorrectly believe that it's possible to contract the virus by sitting next to an infected person. [The Washington Post](#)

### Brazil to fight Zika by sterilizing mosquitoes with gamma rays

22 February - Brazil is planning to fight the Zika virus by zapping millions of male mosquitoes with gamma rays to sterilize them and stop the spread of the virus linked to thousands of birth defects. Called an irradiator, the device has been used to control fruit flies on the Portuguese island of Madeira. The International Atomic Energy Agency said on Monday it will pay to ship the device to Juazeiro, in the northeastern state of Bahia, as soon as the Brazilian government issues an import permit. ... A Brazilian non-profit called Moscamed will breed up to 12 million male mosquitoes a week and then sterilize them with the cobalt-60 irradiator, produced by Canadian company MDS Nordion, Bourtzis said. The sterile males will be released into target areas to mate with wild females who will lay eggs that produce no offspring, he said during an IAEA meeting of mosquito control experts. [Reuters](#)

### CDC arrives in Brazil to investigate Zika outbreak

24 February - A team of U.S. government disease detectives launched an eagerly anticipated research project in Brazil on Monday designed to determine whether the Zika virus is really causing a surge of serious birth defects. A 16-member team of epidemiologists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began training dozens of Brazilian counterparts in Joao Pessoa, Brazil, in preparation to begin work on Tuesday. The researchers will gather data on hundreds of Brazilian women and their children. ... Scientists believe there has been a significant increase in microcephaly, a condition that causes babies to be born with

abnormally small heads and brain, since Zika started spreading widely in Brazil. That strongly suggests that the virus is to blame. Zika has been found in the brains of a small number of babies with microcephaly, but that still does not prove the virus is to blame. ... To try to better understand whether the association is real, the CDC is launching what is known as a "case-control" study, which involves comparing cases of people with diseases with similar people who did not have disease to try to identify the cause. [NPR](#)

## **CDC investigating 14 new potential cases of sexually transmitted Zika**

23 February - Federal and state health officials are investigating 14 new reports of potential sexual transmission of the Zika virus in the United States, including several cases involving pregnant women, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention disclosed Tuesday. In at least two of the cases, a Zika infection was confirmed in women whose only known risk factor was sexual contact with an ill male partner who recently had returned from one of the nearly three dozen countries where the virus has now spread. Four other women have tested positive for Zika in preliminary lab tests but are awaiting final confirmation. The CDC said the eight other cases remain under investigation. [The Washington Post](#)

## **President Barack Obama has sent lawmakers an official \$1.9 billion request to combat the spread of the Zika virus**

22 February - President Barack Obama has sent lawmakers an official \$1.9 billion request to combat the spread of the Zika virus in Latin America and the U.S. He is also requesting flexibility to use a limited portion of leftover funds provided in 2014 to fight Ebola to take on Zika, which has been linked to devastating birth defects. Top House Republicans told the White House last week that the quickest way to get the money to fight Zika would be to use some of the approximately \$2.7 billion in "unobligated" Ebola-fighting money to combat Zika. [U.S. News and World Report](#)

## **Strong links between Zika virus, birth defects examined**

19 February - Experts in epidemiology and virology gathered Wednesday at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to discuss Zika virus response in Central and South America and the evidence linking the disease to the abnormally high incidents of microcephaly in Brazil. The panelists emphasized how little is known of the virus. ... Jeanne Sheffield, director of the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, shared a study of 35 infants who exhibited two or more standard deviations in brain or cranial development. ... In all 35 cases, the mothers had lived in or traveled to Zika-endemic areas at some point during their pregnancies, and 74 percent of the mothers reported having a rash during their first or second trimester. ... Even when the mother no longer carries the virus in her blood, physicians have detected Zika in amniotic fluid, which indicates that the fetus has been infected and is urinating the virus out, said Sheffield. ... As

a result, physicians in endemic areas are offering amniocenteses to evaluate the amniotic fluid for traces of the infection. [Hub](#)

## Texas hospitals say they have developed rapid test for Zika

23 February - Two major Texas health centers have developed what they are calling the country's first hospital-based, rapid test for the Zika virus that can produce results in a matter of hours, the hospitals said on Tuesday. Researchers at Texas Children's Hospital and Houston Methodist Hospital developed the test that detects the genetic material of the Zika virus, which can speed diagnosis and treatment, they said in a statement. ... The test is designed to cut down on testing time, which can take days or even weeks. Typically the testing would be done by state health agencies equipped to do so or federal authorities such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control of Prevention. The test is available only at the two hospitals for now but the researchers are looking to take the tests to more hospitals.

[Reuters](#)

## UN health agency warns El Niño may increase breeding grounds for mosquitoes spreading Zika

25 February – The above-average rainfall caused by El Niño that is expected in parts of South America until May could cause floods and increases in diseases spread by mosquitoes, including malaria and the Zika virus, the World Health Organization has warned. A recent report published by the agency on the health consequences of El Niño forecasts a rise in vector-borne diseases, including diseases spread by mosquitoes – which also include dengue and chikungunya – in Central and South America, particularly in Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina. Severe drought, flooding, heavy rains and temperature rises are all known effects of El Niño – a warming of the central to eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. [UN News Centre](#)

## Venezuela won't talk to Colombia about Zika – and that's a problem

24 February - The Zika outbreak is aggravating an already tense relationship between Venezuela and Colombia. In Colombia, more than 37,000 people have fallen sick. Venezuela reports fewer than 5,000 cases — a number that Colombian officials find suspiciously low. Juan Bitar heads the health department of a state in Colombia that shares a long border with Venezuela. "A lot of people who are sick with Zika in Venezuela are coming [to Colombia] for medical attention," he says. A big part of the problem is that Venezuela is in the middle of an economic crisis. Right now, there's a shortage of everything over there. "They don't have medication. Venezuela doesn't have proper hospital care," says Bitar. "And we know that Venezuela is full of Zika right now." [NPR](#)

## Zika infection may cause stillbirth, loss of brain tissue: report

25 February - A case study of a stillborn baby whose Brazilian mother was infected with Zika raises suspicions that the virus may be capable of doing more damage to fetal tissue than previously thought, researchers said on Thursday. The study showed the baby's brain was absent, a condition known as hydranencephaly. Instead of tissue, the brain cavities were filled with fluid. The baby also had abnormal pools of fluid in other parts of its body. The case, published in the journal PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases, is the first to link Zika virus with damage to fetal tissues outside the central nervous system. ... [Yale University tropical disease expert Dr. Albert Ko] said the case suggests that the virus may be associated with stillbirths, which doctors should be looking for, especially in pregnant women who may not show signs of Zika infection. [Reuters](#)

## Zika virus: women in affected countries should breastfeed, WHO recommends

25 February - The World Health Organization says women in countries hit by the Zika virus should breastfeed their babies and there is no proof the disease can spread to their infants that way. ... In guidance issued Thursday, WHO said while Zika has been detected in breast milk from two mothers, there are no reports of Zika being transmitted to babies via breastfeeding. [CBC News](#)

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### **INFLUENZA**

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## **AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary**

For Week 6:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity increased and was low to high in the majority of states.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity was minimal to low in EUCOM.
- PACOM: Influenza activity increased to moderate in the Republic of Korea and low in Hawaii.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity decreased to minimal across CENTCOM and AFRICOM.
- SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity in Honduras was minimal based on DMSS data.

[DHA -Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch](#)

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

For the week ending 13 February 2016 (Week 6)

All regions, except for RHC-E and CENTCOM, reported significant increases in influenza A activity during week 6. This trend was also seen in the civilian population.

- **ILI Activity:** Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week 6 were 13% lower than the same week last year.
- **Influenza cases:** Two hospitalized influenza cases were reported to APHC (Prov) through DRSi in week 6, both vaccinated AD Service Members. One of the cases had an underlying condition.
- **Viral specimens:** During week 6, 264 of 990 (27%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens. RHC-C reported 70 influenza A-positive specimens, RHC-P reported 38, and RHC-A reported 27. CENTCOM did not report any positive influenza-A specimens, and RHC-E did not report. [APHC](#)

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

During week 6 (February 7-13, 2016), influenza activity increased in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 6 was influenza A, with influenza A (H1N1)pdm09 viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories increased.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was below their system-specific epidemic threshold in both the NCHS Mortality Surveillance System and the 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System. [CDC](#)

## CDC's early estimate finds this year's flu vaccine 59% effective

25 February - A preliminary estimate puts the overall effectiveness of this year's influenza vaccine at 59%, federal officials announced today, which is about triple the number last year, when the vaccine matched up poorly with the dominant circulating flu strain. ... The agency noted that 59% is similar to past seasons when the vaccine was well-matched to circulating strains. In contrast, overall vaccine effectiveness (VE) in the 2014-15 season was estimated at only 19%. [CIDRAP](#)

## ECDC: Flu News Europe

For Week 06/2016 (8-14 February 2016)

- Twenty-one of the 46 Member States that reported epidemiological data from surveillance for influenza-like illness (ILI) and acute respiratory infection (ARI) indicated

increasing rates for week 06/2016; 37 countries reported influenza-virus detections in specimens from sentinel sources, indicating influenza activity in the WHO European Region as a whole.

- Belarus, Finland, Greece, Ireland and Switzerland indicated high-intensity influenza activity. Influenza activity in the Russian Federation and Ukraine declined from very high in week 05/2016 to medium for week 06/2016.
- A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses continue to predominate, accounting for 90% of subtyped influenza A viruses detected through sentinel surveillance.
- Cases of severe disease, mainly in people aged 15–64 years, increased again in week 06/2016, with most of them associated with A(H1N1)pdm09.

[European Center for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO](#)

## NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 12 January 2015:

- Influenza: Three cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H1) among US military basic trainees. No new cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza among US military basic trainees
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were elevated at Fort Benning, Fort Leonard Wood, and MCRD San Diego

[Naval Health Research Center](#)

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

During Surveillance Weeks 6 & 7, 7 - 20 February 2016, a total of 268 specimens were collected and received from 55 locations. Results were finalized for 193 specimens from 45 locations. During Week 6, 26 influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, five A(H3N2), and six influenza B viruses were identified. Twenty-nine influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, two A(H3N2), and seven influenza B viruses were identified during Week 7.

[US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

## WHO: Influenza Update

22 February - Globally, influenza activity in the northern hemisphere continued to increase. High levels of influenza activity have been reported in some countries in Europe. In North America, northern Africa, central and western Asia, increasing activity predominantly of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 virus was observed. In the temperate countries of northern Asia, activity was ongoing with various proportions of circulating seasonal influenza viruses. [WHO](#)

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## VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

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### *E coli* outbreak in upper Midwest tied to alfalfa sprouts

25 February - An outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* O157:NM related to alfalfa sprouts has sickened nine people in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) said yesterday and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed today. ... MDH has linked the outbreak to alfalfa sprouts produced by Jack & The Green Sprouts of River Falls, Wisc. Case-patients consumed sprouts from grocery stores/cooperatives, restaurants, salad bars, and commercial food services. The outbreak investigation is ongoing, and the MDH cautions people not to consume alfalfa sprouts sold by Jack & The Green Sprouts. ... The CDC said the *E coli* outbreak is not related to an ongoing outbreak of *Salmonella* Muenchen linked to alfalfa sprouts from Sweetwater Farms in Inman, Kan.

[CIDRAP Food Outbreak Scan](#) (first item)

### Mars and Snickers bars recalled in 56 countries

24 February - US chocolate giant Mars has ordered a massive international recall of Mars and Snickers bars made at its Dutch factory after a piece of plastic found in one snack was traced back to the site. Millions of chocolate bars were deemed possibly unsafe for consumption in 56 countries after a customer in Germany found a piece of red plastic in his Snickers bar last month. The recall of the chocoholic snacks on Tuesday also affects Milky Way minis and some boxes of Celebrations. It hit most European countries, but it also extended as far as Vietnam and Sri Lanka in Asia. [Al Jazeera](#)

### Multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Muenchen infections linked to alfalfa sprouts

23 February - Thirteen people infected with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Muenchen have been reported from four states. Five ill people have been hospitalized. No deaths have been reported. Collaborative investigative efforts of state, local and federal public health and regulatory officials indicate that alfalfa sprouts produced by Sweetwater Farms of Inman, Kan. are a likely source of this outbreak.

[Infection Control Today](#)

### Outbreak of foodborne botulism associated with improperly jarred pesto — Ohio and California, 2014

26 February - ... This report describes the first U.S. outbreak of botulism linked to pesto. The outbreak involved two patients, both of whom initially were examined for throat pain. The diagnosis of botulism was not made until nearly 2 weeks after symptom onset when both patients were hospitalized in the same health care facility. The pesto was produced without

proper registration and licensure and sold commercially in jars at a farm stand and online. ... As the demand for locally made, ready-to-eat food increases, consumers and public health officials should be aware of the risk for botulism from improperly canned foods such as pesto sold in jars.

[Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

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## WELLNESS

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### Anxiety may influence a woman's heart during exercise

23 February - In women, blood flow to the heart during exercise testing may be influenced by anxiety, while the same does not appear to be true for men, according to results reported in the annual women's themed issue of *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*. Overall, reduced blood flow – called ischemia – was more common in men than in women, and anxiety disorders weren't generally linked to higher or lower risk of ischemia. ... However, women without previously diagnosed heart disease who had anxiety disorders, including things like panic disorder and generalized anxiety, had higher rates of ischemia compared to those without anxiety disorders. [Reuters](#)

### CDC: Obesity prevalence tops 30% in U.S. population

24 February - The prevalence of obesity among adults in the U.S. passed 30% for this first time ever last year, according to new numbers from the CDC. That 30.4% figure (95% CI 29.49-31.26), is up from 29.8% (95% CI 28.98-30.52) in 2014. Obesity was defined as a body mass index of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or more. ... Researchers, led by Tainya C. Clarke, PhD, of National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in Atlanta, also found that more than 45% of black females ages 20 and over were obese (95% CI 41.96-48.39) compared with 27.7% of white females (95% CI 26.20-29.11) and 33.8% of Hispanic females (95% CI 31.36-36.30). Black males had an obesity rate of 34.5% (95% CI 31.11-37.92) versus 30.3% and 31.1% for whites and Hispanics, respectively. For both sexes combined, the prevalence of obesity was highest among adults ages 40–59 (34.9%), followed by adults ages 60 and up (30.1%), and ages 20–39 (26.7%). [MedPage Today](#)

### Does vaginal seeding hurt, not help newborns?

24 February - "Vaginal seeding," in which the mother's vaginal microflora is transferred onto a newborn delivered by cesarean section, may be exposing babies to the risk of further infection, said several pediatric and infectious disease specialists from the U.K. ... [Transferring] the mother's bacteria via a vaginal swab onto the baby's eyes, mouth, face and skin may have the potential to harm a newborn, they wrote in an editorial. ... Specifically, [they] mentioned the potential for transferring such diseases as group B

streptococcus (the most common cause of neonatal sepsis), herpes simplex virus, Chlamydia trachomatis, and Neisseria gonorrhoeae. Certain countries, including the U.K. and Australia, do not test for these pathogens during pregnancy. [MedPage Today](#)

## Drug-coated ring cuts HIV risk by more than half in some women

22 February - An experimental drug-infused ring inserted in the vagina once a month cut the odds of becoming infected with HIV by more than half among women who used the device consistently, in a study in four African countries where the risk of AIDS is high. "Use of the product was enough to demonstrate HIV protection of 27 percent" over placebo, chief author Dr. Jared Baeten, a professor of medicine and global health at the University of Washington in Seattle, told Reuters Health by phone. "And in some groups of women who appeared to use it better, such as women over age 21, the risk of HIV was reduced by more than half." [Reuters](#)

## Flavonoids in fruits and veggies may help fight weight gain with age

25 February - Eating lots of fruits and vegetables rich in flavonoid molecules might help adults minimize weight gain as they age, a recent study suggests. ... Participants reported their weight every two years and completed dietary questionnaires every four years. ... Across all the studies, half of the participants consumed at least 224 milligrams to 247 milligrams of flavonoids a day. Over each four year period, people gained an average of 2.2 to 4.4 pounds. But people with higher than average flavonoid consumption tended to gain slightly less weight. [Reuters](#)

## Half of black gay men will be infected with HIV, CDC finds

23 February - Half of black men who are gay and a quarter of Latino gay men will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetimes if current trends continue, according to a first-of-its-kind federal analysis released Tuesday. The findings present a stark reminder of the threat still posed by the AIDS virus 35 years after the illness was first detected, despite progress in treatment and prevention. ... The report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is the first to project the lifetime risk of HIV infection state-by-state and among certain groups of people. Based on death data from 2009 through 2013, the CDC concluded that gay and bisexual men, African-Americans, and people who live in the South have the highest risk of infection. [Boston Globe](#)

## Q&A: 'If you've been in fire service, you have post-traumatic stress'

18 February - In 2014, 87 firefighters were killed in the line of duty nationwide. That same year, Jeff Dill confirmed that at least another 105 had taken their own lives. He estimates

that was only roughly 30 percent of the actual total number who had committed suicide, which by his math would put the number closer to 350. Dill runs the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance, the only organization that attempts to track and validate suicides by firefighters and emergency medical technicians (EMT). ... [What] are we missing in our fire academies? That's behavioral health. ... I firmly believe that if you've been in the fire service, you suffer from post-traumatic stress. It might not be the disorder PTSD, but you suffer from stress. [Al Jazeera](#)

## Vaccine has cut HPV infection rate in teen girls by two-thirds: study

22 February - Ten years of vaccinating against human papillomavirus (HPV) has cut infections from this cancer-causing virus by 64 percent among teen girls, U.S. health officials report. ... These declines should lead to reductions in diseases caused by HPV, which include cervical cancer, and head and neck cancer, Markowitz said. However, it will take decades to see these reductions, because cancer takes years to develop, she added. "We have seen declines in genital warts [caused by HPV] already," she said. "The next thing we expect to see is a decline in pre-cancers, then later on declines in cancer." ... The investigators found that among girls aged 14 to 19, the prevalence of the types of HPV targeted by the vaccine dropped from 11.5 percent in 2003-2006 to 4.3 percent in 2009-2012. In addition, the prevalence of HPV dropped among women aged 20 to 24, from 18.5 percent to just over 12 percent, the study findings showed. [U.S. News and World Report](#)

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### USAFRICOM

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## Africa notes success with meningitis vaccine, some others

24 February -Representatives from 26 countries in Africa's "meningitis belt" met yesterday in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to celebrate the fact that vaccination campaigns have nearly eliminated serogroup A meningitis cases on the continent, according to a World Health Organization (WHO) press release. ... Meningitis cases in Africa have decreased from more than 250,000 during a 1996 outbreak to 80 cases in 2015, a decline attributed to mass vaccination campaigns in meningitis belt countries, the WHO said. ... In a separate news release related to the Addis Ababa meeting, the WHO's African office noted that, although the continent has seen some successes with childhood vaccines, one in five children on the continent still do not receive life-saving immunizations. [CIDRAP](#)

## Benin: WHO notes 71 Lassa cases in Benin

22 February - Benin reported that seven of its departments have reported 71 total Lassa fever cases, 23 of which proved fatal, the WHO said late last week that. Six of the cases were

confirmed by a laboratory at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital in Nigeria, 10 are probable, and 55 are suspected. Borgou (52) and Collines (13) have reported the most cases, with the other departments reporting 1 to 2 cases each. The WHO reported that 318 contacts have been identified and 292 are currently under follow-up since the beginning of the outbreak on Jan 21.

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

## South Sudan: Looting of charity health center threatens medical care South Sudan

24 February - A health center operated by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) has been damaged by looters in South Sudan, threatening medical care for residents of the violence-torn region, the charity said on Wednesday. The medical compound in Pibor was looted during fighting on Tuesday and Wednesday, leaving at least 35 people wounded and some 1,000 people seeking shelter, it said. The raid threatened to deprive the area located in the nation's east of health care services, MSF said. [Reuters](#)

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### USCENTCOM

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## Qatar reports 1st MERS case of 2016

22 February - The Qatar Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) reported the first case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) of the year in a 66 year old Qatari national yesterday. The man developed symptoms of fever, cough, and diarrhea associated with abdominal pain upon returning from Saudi Arabia where he owns a sheep and camel barn. [Outbreak News Today](#)

## Saudi Arabia reports 2 more MERS cases

25 February - Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health (MOH) today confirmed two new MERS-CoV cases, both primary infections in men who had indirect contact with camels. The first MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) case-patient is a 60-year-old Saudi man from the southern city of Najran. He is in stable condition and is not a healthcare worker, the MOH said. The second MERS infection involves a 56-year-old man in the northwestern city of Ha'il. He is hospitalized in critical condition and is not a healthcare worker. Saudi Arabia has now had 1,302 MERS cases since the outbreak began in 2012, the MOH said. Of those cases, 742 people have recovered, 554 have died, and 6 involve patients still undergoing treatment. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

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## Italy sees fewest births ever in 2015, population drops

19 February - Fewer babies were born in Italy in 2015 than in any year since the modern state was founded 154 years ago, and the population shrank for the first time in three decades, data showed on Friday. Adding to the gloomy picture, the number of deaths jumped more than 9 percent over the previous year. That left Italy with its highest mortality rate since World War Two as life expectancy levels unexpectedly dropped. With the economy stagnating, the slump in productivity has increasingly affected potential parents as well over the past five years, national statistics office ISTAT said. [Reuters](#)

## Ukraine: How Ukraine's war is driving up HIV infections

23 February - NGOs are warning that HIV infections are on the rise in eastern Ukraine, where nearly two years of conflict between pro-Russian separatists and government forces has hit prevention and treatment efforts. ... Even before the conflict, Ukraine had one of the highest rates of HIV infection in Europe. According to the World Bank, 1.2 percent of Ukrainians aged between 15 and 49 were infected with HIV in 2014. About 30 percent of new infections were in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, now partially under rebel control, where tuberculosis – a common opportunistic infection in people with HIV - is also a major health problem. [IRIN](#)

## United Kingdom: UK air pollution 'linked to 40,000 early deaths a year'

23 February - Outdoor air pollution is contributing to about 40,000 early deaths a year in the UK, say the Royal Colleges of Physicians and of Paediatrics and Child Health. They say diesel emissions have been poorly controlled. And indoor air pollution has been overlooked. Tobacco still poses the biggest indoor threat, but wood-burning stoves, cleaning products and air fresheners can contribute. Mould and mildew in poorly ventilated rooms can also cause illness. ... "There is now good awareness of the risks from badly maintained gas appliances, radioactive radon gas and second-hand tobacco smoke, but indoors we can also be exposed to NO2 [nitrogen dioxide] from gas cooking and solvents that slowly seep from plastics, paints and furnishings. "The lemon-and-pine scents that we use to make our homes smell fresh can react chemically to generate air pollutants, and ozone-based air fresheners can also cause indoor air pollution." [BBC News](#)

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## **Canada: First Nations face 'tremendous gap' in health outcomes**

25 February - Federal health officials are in Sioux Lookout, Ont., working with First Nations leaders who say their communities are facing a health emergency, Health Minister Jane Philpott says. ... "Our government acknowledges that there are tremendous and unfortunate gaps in health outcomes that indigenous peoples in Canada are facing," Philpott said. ... People living in remote First Nations in northern Ontario are dying "needlessly" because they don't have access to basic health care, Nishnawbe AskiNation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said. ... In addition to the health care concerns, there is also a public health emergency, Fiddler said, including a lack of clean drinking water that contributes to the spread of infectious diseases. [CBC News](#)

## **U.S.: First uterus transplant in U.S. bolsters pregnancy hopes of many**

25 February - Surgeons at the Cleveland Clinic have performed the first uterus transplant in the United States, the clinic announced Thursday. The operation, which took nine hours, was performed Wednesday, using a uterus from a deceased organ donor. ... The patient will have to wait a year before trying to become pregnant, letting her heal and giving doctors time to adjust the doses of medication she needs to prevent organ rejection. Then she will need in vitro fertilization to become pregnant. Before the transplant, the patient had eggs removed surgically, fertilized with her husband's sperm and frozen. ... The transplant will be temporary: The uterus will be removed after the recipient has had one or two babies, so she can stop taking anti-rejection drug. [The New York Times](#)

## **U.S.: Health officials in Las Vegas declare syphilis outbreak**

25 February - Health officials have declared a syphilis outbreak in the Las Vegas area. The Southern Nevada Health District said Wednesday that Clark County has had a 128 percent increase in reported syphilis cases since 2012. Officials said 615 of the 694 cases involved men being diagnosed in 2015. This marks Nevada as having the highest rates of syphilis in the West. [Fox News](#)

## **U.S.: More than 200 patients at NJ hospital possibly exposed to HIV, hepatitis**

25 February - More than 200 people treated at a New Jersey medical center may have been exposed to HIV or hepatitis B or C because of a former employee accused of tampering with drugs, the hospital said on Thursday. Shore Medical Center in Somers Point, located on the

southern New Jersey coast outside of Atlantic City, sent letters last week to 213 patients who were treated with certain intravenous medications, including morphine, between June 1, 2013 and Sept. 17, 2014. "We have been working with public health authorities to determine if patients could have been exposed to blood-borne pathogens at Shore through contact with this employee's blood," said hospital spokesman Brian Cahill in a statement.

[Reuters](#)

## U.S.: Mumps outbreak reported by Denver, state health officials; 6 cases ID'd

24 February - A mumps outbreak has prompted alerts to healthcare providers across Colorado, with at least four cases confirmed in Denver and two other probable cases under investigation, authorities said Wednesday. "We usually see about 2.5 cases per year (in the city)," said Dr. Heather Young, an infectious disease physician at Denver Health Medical Center who serves as the hospital's epidemiologist. " ... Investigators believe the Colorado cases are linked to a mumps outbreak in Iowa. [The Denver Post](#)

## U.S.: Senators push protections for opioid-dependent parents, infants

23 February - Key senators said on Tuesday they are crafting a law that would allow states to use federal foster care funds to help opioid-addicted parents raise their infants. ... The committee's ranking Democrat, Ron Wyden of Oregon, cited a recent Reuters investigation, which documented 110 preventable deaths of infants sent home with opioid-addicted parents ill-prepared to care for them. ... "A parent's drug addiction is becoming a growing reason for removing children from their homes and placing them in foster care," Wyden said. ... Nancy Young, director of Children and Family Futures, which provides services to government welfare programs, testified that parental opioid use before and after birth places a profound strain on the foster care system. Shifting foster care funds to help parents cope with addiction will reduce costs, she said, in part because it will help keep mothers and infants together. [Reuters](#)

## U.S.: Tornado outbreak kills at least 8; more than two dozen twisters confirmed



25 February – A tornado outbreak stretched into a second full day of destruction and tragedy as the storm system shifted into the mid-Atlantic and Northeast, killing four more people in Virginia. The storm system has spanned hundreds of miles and more than a dozen states since the first tornado was spawned early

Tuesday morning in Texas. Since then, hundreds of residences have been demolished and towns in several regions are faced with an extensive cleanup from these damaging storms. As of Thursday morning, survey teams from the National Weather Service have confirmed

37 tornadoes in this outbreak, and crews will likely confirm more Thursday afternoon. These twisters have killed a total of seven people, and one more was killed by a falling tree in South Carolina.

[The Weather Channel](#)

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## **USPACOM**

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### **Fiji: Tens of thousands of Fijians homeless after cyclone**

25 February - Tens of thousands of Fijians remain homeless and living in evacuation shelters in the aftermath of a devastating cyclone at the weekend, officials said on Thursday, as aid began trickling in to the outer reaches of the South Pacific archipelago. The death toll from Cyclone Winston, the worst storm ever recorded in the southern hemisphere, remained at 42 but officials at Fiji's National Disaster Management Office fear that figure will rise. Officials from the disaster agency estimate that 35,000 people are sheltering in evacuation centers, some of which are damaged and running short of food and other supplies. Some 900,000 people live in the archipelago of more than 300 islands. [Reuters](#)

### **India to change its decades-old reliance on female sterilization**

20 February - ... For decades, India has relied on female sterilization as its primary mode of contraception, funding about four million tubal ligations every year, more than any other country. This year, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi will take a major step toward modernizing that system, introducing injectable contraceptives free of charge in government facilities. The World Health Organization recommends their use without restriction for women of childbearing age. New birth control options have long been advocated by international organizations. ... They say Indian women — often worn out, anemic and at higher risk of death because they bear children young and often — urgently need methods to delay or space pregnancies. [The New York Times](#)

### **India: U.S. and EU regulators urge Indian drug companies to step up standards**

23 February - U.S. and EU drug regulators called upon India's pharmaceutical sector on Tuesday to step up efforts to improve manufacturing standards and ensure the reliability of data if it is to maintain its dominance in the generic drugs industry. India's \$15 billion pharmaceutical industry, an increasingly important global supplier of cheaper generic medicines, has been dogged by concerns over quality issues after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned a series of factories from producing medicines for the United States

due to inadequate standards. ... Officials from the U.S., EU and UK regulators said they plan to increase the number of inspections in India, and are pushing for better cooperation between Indian authorities and companies as well as improved training for staff. ... India supplies about 33 percent of the medicines sold in the United States, and nearly a quarter sold in the UK. [Reuters](#)

## Indonesia: Organ-trafficking syndicate uncovered

22 February - Three members of an organ trafficking syndicate have been arrested and doctors at a government hospital questioned by police after Al Jazeera uncovered an illegal organ trading operation. People from a village in West Java, which has a population of 30, sold their kidneys for around \$5,000, the exclusive investigation revealed. Police said that they had questioned six doctors so far for possible collusion with organised criminals in the trade. [Al Jazeera](#)

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### USSOUTHCOM

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## PAHO notes more than 30,000 new chikungunya cases

22 February - The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) late last week added 1,968 new chikungunya cases to its list, while catch-up reporting of its 2015 cases by El Salvador added 28,722 infections to last year's total. The new numbers bring the 2016 outbreak total to 16,668 confirmed and suspected cases, while the 2015 cases rise to 726,478. The new infections, reported on Feb 19, bring the overall outbreak total to 1,890,772 chikungunya cases. Colombia accounted for the lion's share of the 2016 increase, with 1,189 new cases and 5,752 for the year so far. ... No chikungunya-related deaths have yet been reported for 2016. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

## Uruguay: Dengue fever

25 February - On 13 February 2016, the National IHR Focal Point (IHR NFP) of Uruguay notified PAHO/WHO a case of dengue. The case is a 31-year-old female from Montevideo who developed fever and joint pain on 5 February. ... The patient has no history of travel outside of Uruguay. ... If confirmed, this would be the first case of autochthonous dengue fever detected in Uruguay. Uruguay is one of the few countries in Central and South America that does not have the disease. [WHO](#)

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