

8 January 2016

Army Public Health Weekly Update

Army Public Health Center

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U.S. MILITARY

2015 DoD Health-Related Behaviors Survey Launches Worldwide

Active Duty service members will be randomly selected to represent their Service branch and complete an anonymous Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS). The survey, accessed online, takes about 40 minutes to complete.

The HRBS has been conducted approximately every three years since 1980 and is used to measure the health related behaviors and lifestyles of military personnel that have the potential to impact readiness.

Survey of Health Related Behaviors Website



Acute respiratory infections among enlisted Service members during their first year of military service before and after the 2011 resumption of adenovirus vaccination of basic trainees

December 2015 - This analysis estimated the incidence rates of acute respiratory infections (ARIs) during the first year of military service for service members. ... The surveillance period covered service members whose first years of service were before and after the 2011 resumption of the administration of adenovirus vaccines, types 4 and 7, to enlisted trainees at the beginning of their initial training periods. In general, the findings were that incidence rates of ARIs were relatively high for the cohorts who did not receive the vaccines and that the rates were dramatically lower in the cohorts (2012–2014) who did receive the vaccines. These observations pertained to both the first 3 months of service and the next 9 months of service. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Advancing medical professionalism in US military detainee treatment

5 January - The United States Department of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) promulgated policies and requirements that required health professionals to participate in the mistreatment of counter-terrorism detainees through participation in such practices as abusive interrogation and force-feeding of detainees, in violation of ethical standards established by associations representing the health professions. ... The [Defense Health Board] found that ethical codes promulgated by the health professions, including the duty to avoid harm, provide a sound basis for military medical practice. ... The health professional community should urge the Secretary of Defense to adopt and implement the recommendations of the Defense Health Board, rescind directives authorizing participation of health professionals in interrogation and force-feeding because they are inconsistent with professional ethics, and provide ongoing advice and support for the reform process.

[PLOS Medicine](#)

American Legion questions White House gun restrictions

6 January - The nation's largest veterans organization expressed concern to President Obama that his executive actions on gun control may keep former troops from seeking mental health treatment. ... "The American Legion strongly believes that treatment for PTSD or depression by itself, which a number of wartime veterans experience, should not be the sole factor in denying a veteran the right to purchase a firearm," said American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett. [Military Times](#)

Army Industrial Hygiene News and Regulatory Summary

The December issue highlights articles on acrolein, energy audits, risk scores, police killings, and self-healing protective clothing.



Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report - Calendar Year 2015 Third Quarter

4 January - ... In the third quarter of 2015, the military Services reported that there were 72 Active Component suicides and 70 Reserve Component suicides with 38 suicides in the Reserves and 32 in the National Guard. ... A review of the data ... indicates there were fewer suicides in the third quarter of 2014 compared to the third quarter of 2013 (57 versus 69) while there were more suicides in the third quarter of 2015 compared to the third quarter of 2014 (72 versus 57) within the Active Component.

[Defense Suicide Prevention Office](#)

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GLOBAL

Army begins phase 2 trial of Johnson & Johnson's prime-boost Ebola vaccine

7 January - Johnson & Johnson's prime-boost Ebola vaccine regimen is entering phase 2 clinical trials in both healthy and HIV-infected people, the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) announced yesterday in a press release. This trial involves two vaccine candidates, a priming dose of Ad26.ZEBOV from Crucell Holland B.V., one of the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson, and a booster dose of MVA-BN-Filo from Bavarian Nordic. Phase 2 trials assess vaccine safety and immune response. The study will include 75 adults up to age 70 who will receive the vaccines at the WRAIR Clinical Trials Center in Silver Spring, Md. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (first item)

Laser combination therapy shows promise for cutaneous leishmaniasis treatment

5 January - ... [Researchers] investigated the effectiveness of a laser therapy approach combining ablative fractional laser resurfacing with laser-assisted delivery of topical paromomycin (an antibiotic) to treat cutaneous leishmaniasis, a skin infection caused by a single-celled parasite that is transmitted by the bite of a phlebotomine sandfly. ... A six-week course of oral fluconazole in conjunction with topical paromomycin healed all but the young woman's largest wound located on her left medial lower leg. ... This recalcitrant lesion was subsequently treated with an ablative microfractionated 10,600-nm carbon dioxide laser ... and topical paromomycin applied immediately after laser surgery (i.e., laser-assisted delivery) and continued daily for a total of three months. Her infection resolved, and the lesion healed with minimal scarring in this sensitive anatomic location. [BioOptics World](#)

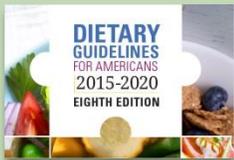
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2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines are designed to help Americans eat a healthier diet. Intended for policymakers and health professionals, this edition of the Dietary Guidelines outlines how people can improve their overall eating patterns — the complete combination of foods and drinks in their diet.

This edition offers 5 overarching Guidelines and a number of Key Recommendations with specific nutritional targets and dietary limits.



INFLUENZA

AFHSB: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 50:

- NORTHCOM: Influenza activity decreased to minimal and low activity for the majority of NORTHCOM.
- EUCOM: Influenza activity remained minimal across EUCOM with the exception of Greece and Turkey which had low activity.
- PACOM: Influenza activity was minimal throughout PACOM, with the exception of Japan which had low activity.
- CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Influenza activity remained minimal in CENTCOM and AFRICOM, with the exception of Afghanistan which had high activity. This may be due to a data anomaly and will be monitored.
- SOUTHCOM: There have been no ILI diagnoses reported from Honduras in the past month. [DHA -Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch](#)

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

During week 51 (December 20-26, 2015), influenza activity increased slightly in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories during week 51 was influenza A, with influenza A (H1N1)pdm09 viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories was low.
- 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](#)

China reports new H5N6 case, also in Guangdong province

7 January - Three of the world's seven human cases of H5N6 have now been reported in the past 10 days, with Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection (CHP) reporting a new case today, following cases on Dec 29 and Jan 4. Today's case involves a 25-year-old man in Shenzhen in Guangdong province, which borders Hong Kong. The man is hospitalized in serious condition, the CHP said. The previous two patients, both women, were also from Guangdong. ... The woman from Shenzhen, age 26, died from the disease, while the one in Zhaoqing, age 40, is in critical condition. ... All seven H5N6 cases have been in China, with the first confirmed in May 2014. [CIDRAP Avian Flu Scan](#) (first item)

Enhanced Entry Airport Screening for Ebola Modified for Travelers from Guinea to the United States

Travelers departing Guinea and entering the United States will be routed through designated U.S. airports conducting enhanced entry screening.

Travelers will be encouraged to watch their health for 21 days after leaving Guinea and to contact their local health departments or seek healthcare if they develop symptoms consistent with Ebola.

Travelers from Guinea will no longer need to be actively monitored by or be in daily contact with their health departments. CDC will continue to evaluate the need for continued screening of travelers from Guinea at regular intervals to consider whether additional step-down measures may be warranted.



ECDC: Flu News Europe

Week 52/2015 (21-27 December)

- Influenza activity remained low in most countries in the WHO European Region.
- The proportion of influenza virus-positive sentinel surveillance specimens increased to 17% from 11% the previous week.
- Detections of A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2) and type B influenza viruses among sentinel surveillance specimens were reported by 14 countries.

Season

- For the first time since week 40/2015, the proportion of influenza virus-positive sentinel surveillance specimens was over 10% for two consecutive weeks, confirming the start of the influenza season in week 51/2015.
- The increase since week 49/2015 in virus detections among sentinel and non-sentinel patients with respiratory disease is due largely to A(H1N1)pdm09 viruses, the subtype representing 84% of subtyped type A viruses. Influenza type B viruses of the Victoria lineage were detected more frequently (75%) than those of the Yamagata lineage (25%). Viruses characterized so far this season are genetically similar to the strains recommended for inclusion in this winter's trivalent or quadrivalent vaccines for the northern hemisphere.

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

NHRC: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 2 January 2016:

- Influenza: Five cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees at MRCD San Diego.
- FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were at or below expected values. [Naval Health Research Center](#)

Study: Flu virus in pigs shows worrisome pandemic profile

29 December - Tests on the most common type of influenza found in Chinese pigs reveal that it has the potential to transmit easily in humans, posing a pandemic threat similar to the virus that triggered a pandemic in 2009 after jumping from swine to people. A research team from China and Japan isolated 139 Eurasian avian-like H1N1 swine influenza viruses during surveillance in Chinese pigs from 2010 to 2013, then put the virus through its paces to assess its pandemic threat, including experiments in ferrets to gauge transmissibility in mammals. ... Using a US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention risk assessment tool to look at the pandemic potential of influenza viruses, the researchers found that EAH1N1 SIV scored the highest of six viruses, which also included H5N1, H9N2, variant H3N2, H7N9, and avian H1N1. The result suggests that EAH1N1 SIVs "may pose the highest pandemic threat among the avian influenza viruses currently circulating in animals," they wrote. [CIDRAP](#)

Webinar:
Syphilis in the Navy
2010-2015

In the Department of the Navy, syphilis is predominately a disease of young, single Navy enlisted men, with rates significantly highest among black men.

The overall trend of syphilis among active duty Navy men during 2010-2015 suggests increasing risk behavior since 2013 among those men at risk for syphilis.

Although the syphilis risk profile of Navy men is unclear, considering the risk profile of Navy men diagnosed with HIV during 2010-2015 (among whom 2 of 3 report sex with a man in the previous 12 months, with rates highest among young, black MSM), Navy MSM may be the group at highest risk for syphilis.

Date: Friday, 15 Jan 2016

Time: 1200 ET

Log in to DCS (CAC card required)

Audio: 877-885-1087

Passcode: 7045160523



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

During 20 December 2015 - 2 January 2016, (Surveillance Weeks 51 & 52), a total of 73 specimens were collected and received from 28 locations. Results were finalized for 51 specimens from 24 locations. During Week 51, two influenza B viruses were identified. No influenza viruses were identified during Week 52. [US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

WHO: Influenza Update

28 December - Globally, influenza activity generally remained low in both hemispheres.

- In a few countries in Central and Northern Asia, as well as in Eastern and Northern Europe, there were slight increases in influenza detections in recent weeks.
- In Eastern Asia, the rest of Europe, North Africa and North America, influenza activity continued at low, inter-seasonal levels.
- In southern and western Asia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan reported elevated influenza activity, predominantly influenza A(H1N1)pdm09. Oman reported increased influenza activity, predominantly due to influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and influenza B viruses, while Bahrain reported a decline in influenza activity. Qatar also reported a decline in influenza activity but remained at elevated levels.
- Few influenza virus detections were reported by countries in tropical Africa.
- In tropical countries of the Americas, Central America and the Caribbean, respiratory virus activity remained at low levels, with the exception of Costa Rica(A(H3N2)), Cuba (A(H3N2)) and Nicaragua (A(H1N1)pdm09).
- In tropical Asia, countries in South East Asia reported low influenza activity overall except Thailand where activity mainly due to B viruses continued to be reported.
- In the temperate countries of the Southern Hemisphere, respiratory virus activity was generally low in recent weeks with low levels of influenza virus detections reported.

[WHO](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

U.S. refocuses on testing to fight deadly hog virus

4 January - The U.S. Department of Agriculture will spend the rest of emergency money it received to fight a deadly hog virus in 2014 on testing for the disease. The change, announced in a notice issued on Monday, means the USDA will stop reimbursing farmers to implement measures, such as truck washing, to prevent infections of Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus (PEDv). An outbreak of the virus, which causes severe diarrhea that kills baby

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<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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pigs, wiped out up to 8 million hogs, a tenth of the nation's herd, three years ago, and drove pork prices to record highs. Farmers fear the disease could return this winter due to waning immunity levels in herds. [Reuters](#)

Veterans say trained dogs help with PTSD, but the VA won't pay

4 January - ... Service dogs are often trained to help veterans with physical disabilities. Now, a growing number are being trained to meet the demand from vets with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues. Those dogs learn extra tricks — how to sweep a house for intruders, for example, so a veteran feels safe. ... These dogs also learn how to create personal space for a veteran by stepping in front or behind the owner to block people from approaching. ... So far, though, the Department of Veterans Affairs won't help pay for service dogs for PTSD, citing a lack of scientific evidence. But it's launching a study to find out what effect specially trained service dogs can have on the lives of veterans with PTSD. Vets with PTSD who already rely on service dogs say the research should have been done years ago. [NPR](#)

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WELLNESS

A healthy diet's main ingredients? Best guesses

3 January - ... This Retro Report episode comes as the federal government is again rethinking its Dietary Guidelines for Americans. ... The new guidelines are expected to be issued this month by the Departments of Agriculture and of Health and Human Services, which tend to follow the recommendations of an advisory committee. One likely eye-catcher is a new assessment of cholesterol, long an archvillain. ... Months ago, the advisory committee concluded that the dietary intake of cholesterol (the body produces this waxy, artery-obstructing matter on its own) had no real effect on blood levels of LDL, the so-called bad cholesterol. [The New York Times](#)

As home births grow in U.S., a new study examines the risks

30 December - ... How safe is it to have a baby outside a hospital? ... [A new] study analyzed nearly 80,000 pregnancies in Oregon, and found that when women had planned out-of-hospital deliveries, the probability of the baby dying during the birth process or in the first month after — though slight — was 2.4 times as likely as women who had planned hospital deliveries. Out-of-hospital births also carried greater risk of neonatal seizures, and increased the chances that newborn babies would need ventilators or mothers would need blood

transfusions. On the other hand, out-of-hospital births were far less likely to involve cesarean sections — 5.3 percent compared with 24.7 percent in a hospital. They also involved fewer interventions to augment labor, and mothers had fewer lacerations. [The New York Times](#)

Closing the farm-to-table gap in Alaska



3 January - Across much of Alaska at this time of the year, as winter tightens its grip with darkness and cold, finding a nice crisp head of lettuce at an affordable price can be like prospecting for gold. Where the farm-to-table distance is measured in thousands of miles, the odds get long. ... Two new small start-ups, each with a starkly different vision for

how to grow produce year round, under uniquely Alaskan conditions, have opened their doors. Mr. Smith, a 34-year-old Marine infantry veteran, raises greens hydroponically — in water, without soil or pesticides, under blue-and-red LED lights — and sold his first crop this fall. Vertical Harvest Hydroponics, another new company [is] ... refitting boxcar-size ship cargo containers into indoor grow spaces that can be installed in restaurant basements, parking lots or remote, off-the-road-grid villages where the only access — for people or produce — is by air or sea.

[The New York Times](#)

E-cigarette ads' wide reach among U.S. youth alarming

5 January - E-cigarette companies are reaching about seven in 10 U.S. middle- and high-school students with advertisements employing themes of sex, independence and rebellion that hooked previous generations on regular cigarettes, a government study released on Tuesday said. The marketing strategy could reverse decades of progress in preventing tobacco use among youth, warned the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which suggested tighter controls on e-cigarette sales to reduce minors' access. ... E-cigarette use among middle- and high-school students soared over the past five years, surpassing use of regular cigarettes in 2014, according to CDC statistics. [Reuters](#)

Increases in drug and opioid overdose deaths — United States, 2000–2014

1 January - The United States is experiencing an epidemic of drug overdose (poisoning) deaths. Since 2000, the rate of deaths from drug overdoses has increased 137%, including a 200% increase in the rate of overdose deaths involving opioids. ... During 2014, a total of 47,055 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States, representing a 1-year increase of 6.5%, from 13.8 per 100,000 persons in 2013 to 14.7 per 100,000 persons in 2014. The rate of drug overdose deaths increased significantly for both sexes, persons aged 25–44 years and ≥55 years, non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks, and in the Northeastern, Midwestern, and Southern regions of the United States. Rates of opioid overdose deaths

also increased significantly, from 7.9 per 100,000 in 2013 to 9.0 per 100,000 in 2014, a 14% increase. ... Between 2013 and 2014, ... the age-adjusted rate of death involving natural and semisynthetic opioid pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids, other than methadone (e.g., fentanyl) increased 9%, 26%, and 80%, respectively. The sharp increase in deaths involving synthetic opioids, other than methadone, in 2014 coincided with law enforcement reports of increased availability of illicitly manufactured fentanyl. [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

New dietary guidelines urge less sugar for all and less protein for boys and men

7 January - New federal dietary guidelines announced on Thursday urge Americans to drastically cut back on sugar, and for the first time have singled out teenage boys and men for eating too much meat, chicken and eggs. Despite those warnings, the guidelines were also notable for what they did not say. While draft recommendations had suggested all Americans adopt more environmentally-sustainable eating habits by cutting back on meat, that advice was dropped from the final guidelines. And longstanding limits on dietary cholesterol were also removed, a victory for the nation's egg producers, which have long argued that cholesterol from eggs and seafood is not a major health concern. [The New York Times](#)

Over 90% of opioid overdose survivors continue to be prescribed opioids

4 January – Most patients who experience a nonfatal prescription opioid overdose continue to receive opioids afterward, increasing their risk for a second overdose, finds a retrospective study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Using data from a U.S. health insurer, researchers studied some 2800 adults who survived a first opioid overdose during long-term opioid therapy for noncancer pain. Over roughly 10 months post-overdose, 91% of patients continued to receive opioid prescriptions; for 61% of these patients, the same clinician issued prescriptions both pre- and post-overdose. At 2 years, the incidence of repeated overdose was significantly higher among those prescribed high- and moderate-dosage opioids after the first overdose (roughly 16%) than among those who discontinued opioids (8%). [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Rumor of neglect ups risk of later maltreatment for kids

5 January - When child protective services receives a report of neglect of a child with a disability, even when the report is unsubstantiated, that child is more likely than others to experience maltreatment later, according to a new study. Children with disabilities are more likely to be referred to child protective services (CPS) than children without disabilities, the researchers say. ... By 2012, 45 percent of children with disabilities had been referred again to CPS, compared to 36 percent of those without disabilities. Sixteen percent of those with disabilities had experienced substantiated maltreatment and seven percent had been placed in foster care. Maltreatment and foster care were both more common for kids with

disabilities, the authors reported in JAMA. [Reuters](#)

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USAFRICOM

Conditions in Liberia's urban slums helped fuel Ebola spread

31 December - Poorer neighborhoods in Liberia's capital were linked to more intense, widespread transmission of Ebola virus disease, compared to more well-off parts of Monrovia, a pattern seen with other infectious disease, researchers reported today. However, a silver lining they found in the urban slums was evidence for strong social networks, which can be enlisted to help battle the disease. [CIDRAP](#)

Ebola treatment using plasma from survivors is not effective, study says

6 January - A treatment once considered among the most promising for Ebola patients was not found to be effective in a study performed in Guinea, researchers reported Wednesday in The New England Journal of Medicine. The experimental treatment involved transfusions of blood plasma collected from Ebola survivors, whose immune systems develop antibodies to neutralize the virus. But the survival rate among the 84 patients in the study who received such transfusions last year was not significantly better than for previous patients who had not received transfusions. [The New York Times](#)

Guinea declared free of Ebola virus that killed over 2,500

30 December - Guinea was declared free of Ebola transmission on Tuesday after more than 2,500 people died from the virus in the West African nation, leaving Liberia as the only country still counting down the days until the end of the epidemic. The announcement made at a ceremony in the capital comes 42 days after the last Ebola patient tested negative for a second time. The country now enters a 90-day period of heightened surveillance, the U.N. World Health Organization said. The world's worst Ebola outbreak began in Guekedou, eastern Guinea, in December 2013 before spreading to Liberia, Sierra Leone and seven other countries. ... About 6,200 children have been left orphaned, said Rene Migliani, from Guinea's Ebola coordination centre. [Reuters](#)

Nigeria: Lassa fever kills 35 in 7 Nigerian states

8 January - Nigeria's health minister is urging Nigerians not to panic over an outbreak of Lassa fever that has killed 35 people in seven states since November. Dr. Isaac Adewole says the government has taken adequate measures to contain the outbreak, with 14 lab-

confirmed cases among 76 suspected ones. Lassa, named after a Nigerian town where the acute viral hemorrhagic fever first was identified in 1969, has the same symptoms as Ebola and also requires that health workers wear protective gear and patients be isolated. Only about 1 percent of patients die. The disease is carried by rats and mostly affects rural communities with poor sanitation or crowded living conditions. It is only found in West Africa. [ABC News](#)

South Sudan: 'Unprecedented' malaria outbreak in South Sudan



4 January - ... Malaria is endemic to South Sudan and is the leading cause of death and illness, but this year Doctors Without Borders say the malaria outbreak is shaping up to be the most severe it has seen. The United Nations has described it as "unprecedented". Nearly 1.6 million malaria cases have been reported so far,

according to the UN Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs. The number of cases in most areas has doubled, and in some quadrupled, compared with the same period last year. The state of Northern Bahr el Ghazar is one of the worst affected. [Al Jazeera](#)

Study finds West Africa at highest risk of bat-to-human virus spread

5 January - Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia are most at risk from bat viruses jumping to humans and causing new diseases that could lead to deadly outbreaks, scientists warned on Tuesday. Approximately 60 to 75 percent of emerging infectious diseases are so-called "zoonotic events" ... The tiny animals are the suspected origin of rabies, Ebola, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and possibly Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and could cause other as yet unknown epidemics in future. Scientists at University College London (UCL), the Zoological Society of London and Edinburgh University aimed to map out the highest-risk areas, using a variety of factors including large numbers of bat viruses found locally, increasing population pressure, and hunting bats for bushmeat.

[Reuters](#)

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USCENTCOM

Oman: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

7 January - On 3 January 2016, the National IHR Focal Point of Oman notified WHO of 1

additional case of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection.

[WHO](#)

Saudi Arabia: Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

4 January - Between 29 November and 17 December 2015, the National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia notified WHO of 4 additional cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection, including 2 deaths. [WHO](#)

Syria: As rebel-held town of Madaya starves, Syria agrees to food aid, U.N. says

7 January - Amid mounting international dismay over reports of starvation deaths and images of skeletally thin children in the besieged, rebel-held Syrian town of Madaya, the Syrian government agreed Thursday to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations. But no firm date was set, and senior United Nations officials said that while they welcomed the government's decision to allow the aid to enter, 42,000 people in Madaya remained "at risk of further hunger and starvation," citing "credible reports of people dying from starvation and being killed while trying to leave."

[The New York Times](#)

Syria: Security Council briefed on possible sarin use in Syria

5 January - The acting U.N. disarmament chief told the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday that the chemical weapons watchdog agency has reported a possible use of the deadly nerve agent sarin in an alleged chemical attack in Syria. Kim Won-soo spoke to several reporters after briefing the Security Council behind closed doors on the latest report from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The report said OPCW investigators who looked at 11 incidents of alleged use of toxic chemicals in Syria came across one instance of blood samples indicating "that individuals were at some point exposed to sarin or a sarin-like substance." [ABC News](#)

Yemen: Dengue fever spreads in Yemeni city ravaged by cyclone



4 January - ... Early last November, a rare cyclone hit the port of Mukalla and neighbouring regions in Hadramout province. The cyclone produced flash floods that ruined roads, houses and sewer systems. Two months later, the city remains submerged in sewage swamps. ... Mukalla was hit by a second outbreak of dengue fever in mid-November, months after recovering from a similar wave earlier in the

year. ... Officials say that regional and international aid organisations have expressed reluctance to dispatch aid to a city under the control of al-Qaeda. Riad al-Juriri, who heads the provincial office of the minister of health in Mukalla, told Al Jazeera that his office has logged 1,040 suspected cases of dengue fever and 280 confirmed cases since mid-November. So far, seven have died. [Al Jazeera](#)

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France: Report from Paris

31 December - ... [Carl] Ogereau, the assistant head of the emergency department at the Hôpital Saint Louis, was in charge on Friday, November 13. It started as an ordinary Friday night, the emergency department full of patients. ... Sometime around 9:30 p.m., a colleague ran into the emergency department, shouting breathlessly that there was shooting outside and she needed a stretcher. ... Neighbors or friends brought in the first victim. The second came on a stretcher. "And after that, stretchers, stretchers, patients, patients, patients." [New England Journal of Medicine](#)

Spain: Third person dies in Legionnaires' disease outbreak in Spain

4 January - A third person died over the weekend as the result of an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in a small Spanish town. It was confirmed on Monday that a 94-year-old man, who had been in hospital since Dec. 26, was the third victim of the outbreak to have struck the town of Manzanares, which is in the region of Castile-La Mancha, south of Madrid. The outbreak, which began in December, has so far affected a total of 235 people of whom 10 remain in hospital, although health authorities are confident that it has now been brought under control with only one new case being discovered in the past 48 hours. Meanwhile, tests carried out at the University of Valencia have found that the source of the outbreak could be the ornamental fountain which is located at the bus station in Manzanames. [Xinhua](#)

United Kingdom: Britain set for first mass strike by doctors in 40 years

5 January - The British government said it was seeking to hold talks with doctors in its state-funded health service in a last-ditch bid to avert a series of mass walkouts, potentially the first such strikes for four decades. Junior doctors, or doctors in training who represent just over half of all doctors in the National Health Service, said on Monday they would stage a 24-hour stoppage next week, followed by two further 48-hour strikes. It will affect non-

emergency care and lead to the cancellations of many operations. ... Planned walkouts before Christmas were suspended to allow for further talks in the dispute which centers on pay and conditions, but on Monday the doctors' union, the British Medical Association (BMA), said these discussions had failed to make progress. [Reuters](#)

United Kingdom: Dental care in England 'third world'

4 January - Standards of NHS dental care in England have been likened to a "Third World" service, by dentists. The care, already "unfit for purpose", is becoming even worse, a letter signed by 400 dentists, in the Daily Telegraph newspaper, adds. ... The letter also calls the levels of tooth decay in children a "national disgrace". Figures published last year by the Health and Social Care Information Centre showed nearly half of eight-year-olds and a third of five-year-olds had signs of decay in their milk teeth. The Children's Dental Health Survey for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, carried out every 10 years, also found 46% of 15-year-olds had decay in their teeth - although that represented an improvement on the previous survey. [BBC News](#)

United Kingdom: Obesity 'linked to cancer rise'

7 January - If current trends continue, experts say, almost three in four adults could be overweight or obese by 2035, bringing a host of health issues. ... Recent studies suggest obesity is linked to several cancers - including oesophageal (gullet), womb, and bowel tumours. In this study, researchers used a computer modelling system, together with historical and current health data, to predict the impact of obesity over the next 20 years. Their work suggests a rise in the number of people who are overweight or obese would contribute to 4.6 million additional cases of type-2 diabetes and 1.6 million extra cases of heart disease by 2035. [BBC News](#)

United Kingdom: UK regulators license BAT e-cigarette as quit-smoking medicine

4 January - Britain's drug regulators have given the go-ahead for a British American Tobacco electronic-cigarette vaping device to be sold as a quit smoking medicine, the first such product to be given a drug license in the UK. The decision to license BAT's e-Voke product means it can now be prescribed on the state-funded National Health Service for patients trying to give up smoking. "We want to ensure licensed nicotine containing products -- including e-cigarettes -- which make medicinal claims are available and meet appropriate standards of safety, quality and efficacy to help reduce the harms from smoking," the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said in a statement on Monday. [Reuters](#)

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U.S. becomes more vulnerable to tropical diseases like Zika

4 January - ... Until May, Zika had never touched this hemisphere except on Easter Island, 2,200 miles off the Chilean coast. Now it circulates in 14 Latin American or Caribbean countries and Puerto Rico. Early last month, an official from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicted that Zika would follow the pattern in the United States that dengue has: many cases in Puerto Rico, followed by outbreaks in Florida, Gulf Coast states and maybe Hawaii. But the C.D.C. is unwilling to predict the aftermath, including whether all outbreaks will be snuffed out before any babies will suffer. "Information is pretty limited," Dr. Erin Staples, a C.D.C. epidemiologist for vector-borne diseases, said of Brazil's outbreak. "There hasn't been enough testing for Zika, so it's not known how many women have been infected." [The New York Times](#)

U.S.: Governor declares emergency over Los Angeles gas leak

6 January - Natural gas has been spewing into the air in the Porter Ranch neighborhood here since late October, sickening residents, prompting thousands to evacuate their homes and pouring greenhouse gas into the atmosphere. Gov. Jerry Brown, faced with mounting public anger and no end in sight to the leak, declared a state of emergency on Wednesday for the neighborhood of about 30,000 at the edge of the San Fernando Valley. ... Already, more than 2,000 families have left this affluent suburb because of the terrible smell and its side effects, which include nosebleeds, headaches, dizziness and vomiting. Health officials have been testing the air quality in the area and insist there are no long-term health risks, though short-term effects like the ones residents have cited are common, and result not from the gas but rather from chemicals put into the gas so humans can smell it. [The New York Times](#)

U.S.: FDA announces new blood donation policy for MSM

21 December - The FDA announced Monday that it was relaxing its ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men. The agency released final guidance for reducing the risk of HIV transmission by blood and blood products, by lifting an indefinite deferral for men who have sex with men (MSM). Instead, the new policy excludes only those whose last sexual contact with another man occurred in the 12 months prior to donation. The FDA's original ban for MSM blood donations was established in 1983. ... [Peter Marks, MD, PhD] also announced that the deferral for hemophiliacs and those with similar clotting disorders would continue, however, under a new rationale. "The deferral is now based on the potential harm to the donors from the large bore needles used during the donation process rather than the risk of HIV transmission." Lastly, Mark noted that gender would be "self-

identified and self-reported" at the time of donation and that there would be "no specific ban for transgender individuals." [MedPage Today](#)

U.S.: FDA drug approvals hit 19-year high

5 January - 2015 was a good year for innovation in medicine with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approving 45 novel drugs, four more than in 2014 and the most since the all-time record of 53 set in 1996. Across the Atlantic, the European Medicines Agency recommended 93 new products, including generics, up from 82 in 2014. But despite the rosy statistics and the prospect for further progress in 2016, the pharmaceuticals industry faces challenges, with increased political focus on drug pricing having punctured both biotech and specialty pharma valuations in recent months. [MedPage Today](#)

U.S. may lack resources to treat kids in disasters

5 January - In the event of a natural disaster, epidemic or terrorist attack, the U.S. may not have enough medical resources to aid affected children, according to a report from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Children are particularly vulnerable to illness and injuries during these emergency situations and their distinct needs – such as special drug formulations or dosing and pint-size medical devices – mean supplies set aside for adults may not work for them. To start fixing the problem, the U.S. needs more investment in treatments that are appropriate for children, including research to develop age-appropriate therapies as well as investments to increase the nation's stockpile of remedies already made for kids, according to the report from AAP's Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council. [Reuters](#)

U.S.: New El Nino storm drenches, disrupts California

6 January - The latest El Nino storm hit at the height of the San Francisco commute, causing car crashes, toppling trees and flooding streets and streams around most of the region. The California Highway Patrol estimated there were nearly two dozen weather-related crashes on Wednesday during the morning drive. The National Weather Service has issued a flash-flood watch for nearly the entire San Francisco Bay Area. ... The thousand-mile coast of California is covered in warnings, watches and advisories for rain, flooding and high surf as another El Nino storm moves in from the Pacific. The system Wednesday will pack colder temperatures, stronger winds and heavier rainfall than the two previous storms that have battered the state since the weekend. Motorists in mountain areas are warned that blizzard conditions are possible above 4,000 feet — including several inches of snow and wind gusts up to 60 mph. Flash flooding and flows of mud and debris are a worry in foothill neighborhoods beneath areas left barren by last year's wildfires. [ABC News](#)

U.S.: NSABB launches new phase of GOF research debate

7 January - Debate over controversial "gain-of-function" (GOF) studies on H5N1 flu and other pathogens took a major step forward today, with experts for the first time addressing three key documents that came out of a federal advisory group's charge by the Obama administration to help guide funding policies. In October 2014 the White House announced

a pause on federally funded GOF research, which involves studies that enhance the pathogenicity, transmissibility, or host range of a pathogen to better understand it. The White House also asked the National Institutes of Health's National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) to come up with recommendations to help federal officials weigh funding decisions. [CIDRAP](#)

U.S.: Puerto Rico reports first case of Zika virus, spread by mosquitoes

31 December - Puerto Rico has reported its first case of Zika, a mosquito-borne virus that has been spreading across South America and the Caribbean and has been linked by Brazilian authorities to a serious birth defect, a U.S. Congressman said on Thursday. Pedro Pierluisi, Puerto Rico's representative in Congress, said in a statement his office had been in touch with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which had confirmed the single case of Zika on the island. [Reuters](#)

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Cambodia: Malaria treatment fails in Cambodia because of drug resistance

7 January - Malaria-carrying parasites in parts of Cambodia have developed resistance to a major drug used to treat the disease in Southeast Asia, according to research published on Thursday in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal. The drug piperazine, used in combination with the drug artemisinin, has been the main form of malaria treatment in Cambodia since 2008. The combination is also one of the few treatments still effective against multi drug-resistant malaria which has emerged in Southeast Asia in recent years, and which experts fear may spread to other parts of the world. ... Artemisinin resistance has been found in five countries in Southeast Asia - Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Resistance to both artemisinin and drugs used in combination with it has developed in parts of Cambodia and Thailand. [Reuters](#)

China weighs ban on manta ray gills, sold in traditional market as modern panacea

6 January - ... Retailers claim that the [manta ray] gills are a time-tested panacea for modern ills, that they can increase the amount of breast milk, detoxify the blood, cure chickenpox, heal tonsillitis and clear a smoker's lungs. ... Conservationists say the Chinese trade in manta ray gills has soared over the past decade, fueled not by a renaissance of tradition but by an unscrupulous network of traffickers looking for ever new ways to profit from the Chinese

appetite for wildlife. ... Toxicology tests by WildAid have also revealed that many of the gills sold at the Qingping market contain dangerous levels of heavy metals and carcinogens, including arsenic, cadmium, mercury and lead, toxic substances that accumulate as the mantas filter plankton through their gills. The sale of such a hazardous and scientifically unproven cure-all online and in stores ... highlights an alarming flaw in the government's tattered food safety system, which largely ignores traditional medicine. [The New York Times](#)

Thailand's road deaths surge despite junta's hardline tactics

5 January - The number of deaths on Thailand's roads increased over the New Year period despite a crackdown on drunk drivers by the ruling junta, according to official statistics released on Tuesday. The government said 380 people had died in 3,379 accidents during a seasonal surge dubbed the "Seven Dangerous Days", the highest toll in five years on what are already some of the world's deadliest roads. Thailand reported a higher road death rate than any other country apart from war-ravaged Libya in a report published last year by the World Health Organization (WHO). [Reuters](#)

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Brazil: Alarm spreads in Brazil over a virus and a surge in malformed infants

30 December - ... The alarm stems from a huge surge in babies with [microcephaly](#), a rare, incurable condition in which their heads are abnormally small. Brazilian officials have registered at least 2,782 cases this year, compared with just 147 in 2014 and 167 the year before. At least 40 of the infants have recently died, and some Brazilian researchers warn that cases could multiply in the months ahead. Those babies who survive may face impaired intellectual development for life. Brazilian researchers say that Zika, an obscure mosquito-borne virus that made its way to the country only recently, is to blame for the sudden increase in brain damage among infants. But other virologists caution that more testing is needed to prove the dangerous link between the virus and brain damage. ... Before Zika's arrival, Brazil was already grappling with a much deadlier epidemic of dengue, another virus transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes. Brazil had nearly 1.6 million cases of dengue in 2015, according to estimates from the Health Ministry, up from 569,000 in 2014. At least 839 people have died from dengue in Brazil this year, an 80 percent increase from the previous year. [The New York Times](#)

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The *Army Public Health Weekly Update* is published by the Public Health Information Directorate, Army Public Health Center.

