

13 March 2015

Army Public Health Weekly Update

U.S. Army Public Health Command



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The Army Medicine 2020 Research to Practice Education Series

The 2015 Soldier Medical Readiness Campaign IP/HPO Education Series will host its next series of presentations:

**23 March 2015
1300-1430 ET**

Presentations include
Pregnancy Postpartum
Physical Training's Effect
on Health, Wellbeing, and
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- Australia: Thousands of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans homeless
- Guam: Two more cases of whooping cough announced by public health
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Why sitting is bad for you

Sitting down for brief periods can help us recover from stress or recuperate from exercise. But nowadays, our lifestyles make us sit much more than we move around. Are our bodies built for such a sedentary existence? Murat Dalkilic investigates the hidden risks of sitting down.



USSOUTHCOM

- [Brazil passes femicide law to tackle rise in gender killings](#)
- [Chikungunya cases in the Americas rise by more than 9,000](#)

U.S. MILITARY

Bipartisan bill would expand VA Agent Orange coverage

9 March - Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Steve Daines (R-Mont.) have introduced legislation that would extend Veterans Affairs Department benefits to "blue water" Vietnam-era veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Vietnam War veterans who served at sea are currently denied VA disability and health benefits for illnesses caused by Agent Orange. Exposure to the chemical can cause a range of diseases, including cancer. The VA says that for an illness to be linked to Agent Orange exposure, a veteran must have "stepped foot on the land of Vietnam" or served in an inland waterway. But, the senators' bill would change that to allow veterans who served up to approximately 12 miles offshore to get VA health and disability benefits for illnesses that are tied to Agent Orange exposure. Under the legislation, if a veteran served offshore and has a disease the VA associates with Agent Orange, then VA officials must presume that the veteran was exposed to the chemical. [The Hill](#)

GAO: Shortfalls in tracking mental health discharges

2 March - The Army, Navy and Marine Corps do not know how many enlisted troops they have separated for mental conditions that don't merit disability pay — a failing that prevents Pentagon officials from knowing whether troops with combat-related disorders were wrongly discharged, a new government report says. When discharging service members for nondisability mental conditions, the three services separated most under the label "condition, not a disability," instead of using one of five separation codes specifically designated for mental conditions, according to the Government Accountability Office. Defense Department policy requires the services to use specific codes, but Army and Marine Corps officials told GAO they didn't use the codes because they did not want separating troops to be stigmatized by a diagnosis when seeking future employment. [Army Times](#)

Investigation: Army substance-abuse program in disarray

12 March - Twenty thousand soldiers who seek help each year at Army substance-abuse clinics encounter a program in such disarray that thousands who need treatment are turned away and more than two dozen others linked to poor care have spiraled into suicide, a USA TODAY investigation has found. The Army's transfer of substance-abuse outpatient treatment from medical to non-medical leadership in 2010 has led to substandard care, the mass exodus of veteran personnel and the hiring of unqualified clinic directors and

Save Your Vision Month

Save Your Vision Month focuses on how to protect vision in combat, the office and at home.

The U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center (USACRC), U.S. Army Public Health Command (PHC), Program Executive Office-Soldier and DOD/Veterans Affairs Vision Center of Excellence teamed to enhance awareness by highlighting Save Your Vision Month, which began March 1.

Serious eye trauma is common in combat and was the second-most common injury in OEF/OIF engagements. A majority of eye injuries happen in the home while doing maintenance or playing sports. Nearly all eye injuries (90 percent) are preventable by wearing the right protective eyewear for the activity.

STAND-TO!
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counselors, according to senior Army clinical staff members and records obtained by USA TODAY. ... The Army emphatically denies that its substance-abuse treatment efforts have declined. Yet Kuehr and the current personnel said the strongest evidence is in quality-review reports filed by Army clinic reviewers who visit each base, pore through medical files and talk with counselors. Dozens of these reports show chronic problems with poor diagnosis and treatment. [Army Times](#)

Researchers identify PTSD biomarkers



10 March - In analyzing blood samples of some 188 U.S. Marines, researchers have located genetic biomarkers linked with post-traumatic stress disorder. The PTSD markers are also associated with gene networks that govern innate immune function and interferon signaling. Researchers at the Veterans Affairs San Diego Healthcare System and

University of California, San Diego School of Medicine say an improved understanding of the gene networks connected with PTSD may help improve diagnosis and treatment of patients dealing with the mental health condition. The same knowledge may also help physicians identify patients who are genetically prone to the development of PTSD. [UPI](#)

Surveillance snapshot: Responses to the traumatic brain injury (TBI) screening questions on the 2012 version of the Post-Deployment Health Assessment (DD Form 2796)

February 2015 - ... Of 367,555 service members with completed [Post-Deployment Health Assessment] forms, 8,127 (2.2%) had a positive TBI screen according to these criteria. Of those with a positive TBI screen, 3,711 (45.7%) reported exposure to a blast or explosion; of those who reported their distance from the blast, the majority reported it was less than 25 meters. Most (94.9%) reported seeing stars or becoming disoriented; approximately one-fifth of respondents (22.4%) reported losing memory of the event and more than a quarter (26.1%) reported losing consciousness. Relatively few respondents (n=597) reported the length of loss of consciousness; of those who did, the majority reported less than 5 minutes. A total of 2,485 service members (30.6%) reported more than one concussive event (i.e., blow or jolt to the head) during the deployment. [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

Testing male, female combat strength

6 March - ... At the Warrior Human Performance Research Center, staff members armed with calipers, sensors and resistance machines spent months taking baseline measurements of the 350 volunteers in an experimental task force. The Marines, including 100 women, are assigned to mixed-gender units of infantry, artillery and mechanized vehicles. Under orders from the Pentagon, each of the armed services as well as special operations command must

Classified Version of the Weekly Update

An Army Public Health Weekly Update is available with articles classified up to the **SECRET** level from the USAPHC SIPRNet site:

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

Look under Hot Topics & Current Issues.

To access this version, you will need a **SECRET** clearance and a SIPRNet account.

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decide whether to integrate women into all occupations and units by the first of the year, or lobby for an exception to the new gender-neutral policy. As the deadline approaches, the question of whether women can excel in physically demanding ground-combat jobs has been central to public debate and military research. [U-T San Diego](#)

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GLOBAL

Abuse-deterrent OxyContin shifted patterns of use, introduced heroin as alternative

12 March - OxyContin abuse changed but didn't end with the advent of an abuse-deterrent formulation in 2010, according to a *JAMA Psychiatry* study. Researchers used data from an ongoing national survey of patients entering treatment centers before and after abuse-deterrent pills were introduced. They found that past-month abuse of OxyContin had occurred in roughly half the sample before the abuse-deterrent formulation, dropping to about 25% afterwards, where it has remained. Continuing abusers of OxyContin switched in the following ways: about 45% changed from injecting or inhaling to swallowing; a third were able to defeat the deterrent safeguards and continued to inject or inhale; and about a quarter continued their previous pattern of swallowing the drug. Only about 3% stopped using opioids completely. Of those who switched drugs, about two thirds found cheap, readily available heroin to be a practical alternative. [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Apple's ResearchKit: Gamechanger for digital health care?



10 March - Just as the launch of Apple's iPod and iTunes proved to be the tipping point in digital music, some are speculating that Apple's new platform for medical researchers and its Apple Watch could do the same for digital, data-driven health care. "They've got the size, the influence, and they're integrating across

consumer digital health to medicine," said Paul Sonnier, a digital health advocate and consultant. ... Apple announced Monday a new open-source platform called ResearchKit to help health researchers enlist and monitor research subjects through Apple devices. "This is a new era," said Yvonne Chan, director of personalized medicine and digital health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. "This is really, truly revolutionizing the way clinical research could be done in the future." Mount Sinai Hospital is one of five medical facilities that will conduct clinical trials using ResearchKit. [CNBC](#)

Blocking the paths to suicide

9 March - Every year, nearly 40,000 Americans kill themselves. The majority are men, and most of them use guns. In fact, more than half of all gun deaths in the United States are suicides. ... Suicide can be a very impulsive act, especially among the young, and therefore difficult to predict. Its deadliness depends more upon the means than the determination of the suicide victim. Now many experts are calling for a reconsideration of suicide-prevention strategies, especially when it comes to guns. While mental health and substance abuse treatment must always be important components in treating suicidality, researchers like Ms. Barber are stressing another avenue: "means restriction." ... About 90 percent of the people who try suicide and live ultimately never die by suicide. If the people who died had not had easy access to lethal means, researchers like Dr. Miller reason, most would still be alive. [New York Times](#)

CPR devices approved for paramedics

9 March - The FDA approved the ResQCPR System of two devices for use by first responders doing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on people in cardiac arrest. "When used together, the two devices may increase the amount of oxygenated blood circulated through a patient's body during CPR" versus the standard technique, the agency noted in announcing the approval. One portion of the system -- the ResQPump Active Compression Decompression CPR Device -- features a handle with two hand grips that attaches to the patient's chest with a toilet plunger-style suction cup so that paramedics can both push to deliver compressions and pull to actively decompress the chest with 10 to 20 lbs. of lift. ... The second device -- the ResQPod 16.0 Impedance Threshold Device -- fits onto the rescue face mask or breathing tube and impedes airflow into the chest during chest decompression for "preloading." [MedPage Today](#)

Exotic micropumps and gels offer hope for hearing disorders

11 March - Sufferers of tinnitus and other hearing disorders have had virtually no proved treatment options. That's because the inner ear is one of the most inaccessible places in the human body—a bony, membrane-lined labyrinth measuring only a few cubic millimeters. These tight quarters make surgery all but impossible. ... Two systems, in particular, are gaining a lot of attention: one that infuses a little polymer matrix with drugs to stop relentless ringing in the ears and one that uses a miniscule pump to deliver the goods to damaged hair cells, or cilia, that cause hearing loss. [Scientific American](#)

High costs attributed to endocrine disruptors

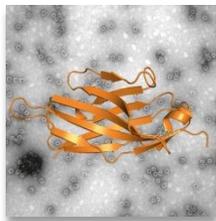
6 March - Exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) cost Europe something like €157 billion (\$209 billion) each year, according to economic analyses that acknowledged the uncertainty of such estimates. Experts meeting for several days in Paris last spring came to the figure by rating the quality of epidemiological and toxicological evidence, calculating

the likelihood of causality, and then running Monte Carlo cost estimates, according to Leonardo Trasande, MD, of New York University, and colleagues. ... It's been a challenge to estimate the societal costs of EDCs exposure because of the uncertainty about causation, given that the best evidence thus far comes from laboratory and epidemiological evidence - not the gold standard of randomized, controlled trials. [MedPage Today](#)

Mad cow research hints at ways to halt Alzheimer's, Parkinson's

9 March - Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis ravage the brain in very different ways. But they have at least one thing in common, says Corinne Lasmezas, a neuroscientist and professor at Scripps Research Institute, in Jupiter, Fla. Each spreads from brain cell to brain cell like an infection. "So if we could block this [process], that might prevent the diseases," Lasmezas says. ... Prions, it turns out, become toxic to brain cells when folded into an abnormal shape. "This misfolded protein basically kills the neurons," Lasmezas says. Neurons, like other cells, depend on proteins to carry out essential tasks, like defending against germs and regulating metabolism. But to function correctly, a protein must be folded into exactly the right shape. If it folds into the wrong shape, it can kill a cell. As scientists learned more about prion diseases like mad cow, they began to realize that misfolded proteins had a role in several human brain diseases ... like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. ... When these misfolded proteins reach a critical mass, they appear to start a chain reaction that eventually destroys the brain. So Lasmezas and many other researchers are looking for ways to slow or halt that chain reaction. [NPR](#)

New tool for detecting, destroying norovirus



6 March - Norovirus infection is the most common cause of viral gastroenteritis, or 'stomach flu.' A research team recently produced 'nanobodies' that could be used to better characterize the structural makeup of the virus. They discovered that these nanobodies could detect the virus in clinical stool samples and disassemble intact norovirus particles. Such nanobodies may potentially be used to not only better detect but also treat symptoms of norovirus infection in the clinic. [ScienceDaily](#)

EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

Death toll from West Africa's Ebola outbreak passes 10,000: WHO

12 March - The death toll from West Africa's Ebola outbreak has passed 10,000, according to the latest tally released by the World Health Organization on Thursday. Liberia has recorded the most deaths with 4,162. Sierra Leone is the second worst-hit nation with 3,655, and Guinea has recorded 2,187 dead, according to the data. The deadly hemorrhagic fever

reached Senegal, Nigeria and Mali but was contained there. A handful of cases have also been recorded in the United States, Spain and Britain. [Reuters](#)

Measles cases seen almost doubling in Ebola epidemic countries

12 March - Measles cases could almost double in countries hardest hit by the West African Ebola outbreak as overwhelmed health systems are unable to maintain child immunizations, scientists said on Thursday. For every extra month that health care systems are disrupted, international researchers said up to 20,000 children aged between nine months and five years were put at risk. "It could be a long time before the health care systems in the region recover from this," said Justin Lessler, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who co-led the study into the ripple effects of the Ebola epidemic. [Reuters](#)

WHO creates independent panel to assess response to Ebola outbreak

10 March - The World Health Organization says it has created a panel of independent experts to assess its response to the biggest-ever Ebola outbreak in history. In a statement Tuesday, the UN health agency said the panel was commissioned after a resolution passed by its executive board. The panel will be chaired by Barbara Stocking, a former chief executive of Oxfam GB. A preliminary report is due in May. WHO's handling of the Ebola outbreak that has killed over 9,900 people in West Africa has been heavily criticized. WHO admitted in an internal draft report that it fumbled early attempts to curb the outbreak, blaming incompetent staff and a lack of real-time information. Others also criticized WHO for not declaring an international health emergency until nearly 1,000 people had died. [CTV News](#)

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INFLUENZA

Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center: DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary

For Week 8:

NORTHCOM: Flu activity seems to have peaked in week 5. The number of states with high flu activity is decreasing.

EUCOM: High influenza activity was seen in Italy and Germany.

PACOM: Influenza activity was high in Hawaii and moderate in South Korea.

CENTCOM and AFRICOM: Flu activity was minimal to low throughout CENTCOM and

AFRICOM.

SOUTHCOM: Influenza activity remains low. [AFHSC DoD Seasonal Influenza Surveillance Summary](#)

CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 8 (February 22-28, 2015), influenza activity continued to decrease, but remained elevated in the United States.

- **Viral Surveillance:** Of 16,821 specimens tested and reported by U.S. World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) collaborating laboratories during week 8, 1,834 (10.9%) were positive for influenza.
- **Pneumonia and Influenza Mortality:** The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was at the epidemic threshold.
- **Influenza-associated Pediatric Deaths:** Six influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported, including one influenza-associated pediatric death that occurred during the 2013-2014 season.
- **Influenza-associated Hospitalizations:** A cumulative rate for the season of 53.5 laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations per 100,000 population was reported.
- **Outpatient Illness Surveillance:** The proportion of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) was 2.5%, above the national baseline of 2.0%. Seven regions reported ILI at or above region-specific baseline levels. [FluView](#)

DoD Global, Laboratory-Based, Influenza Surveillance Program

During Surveillance Weeks 7 & 8, 15-28 February 2015, a total of 310 specimens were collected and received from 50 locations. Results were finalized for 183 specimens from 41 locations. During Week 7, the laboratory identified 41 influenza A(H3N2), 26 influenza B, and one influenza A & B. During Week 8, 25 influenza A(H3N2) and 14 influenza B were identified. [USAF School of Aerospace Medicine](#)

Flu News Europe

Week 09/2015 (23 February - 1 March 2015)

- Influenza activity continues to increase in eastern and central countries of the WHO European Region, but is decreasing in western countries.
- Since week 40/2014, 18 countries have experienced higher than usual levels of influenza activity during this season.
- Since week 04/2015, the proportion of influenza virus detections in sentinel specimens has been about 50%, which is typically seen during peaks of the influenza season. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2) and type B viruses continued to circulate in the Region, with A(H3N2) predominating, despite increasing detections of type B viruses.

- Excess all-cause mortality among people aged ≥ 65 years, concomitant with increased influenza activity and the predominance of A(H3N2) viruses, has been observed since the beginning of the year in Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
- The circulation of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) has decreased to low levels across the European Region. [Flu News Europe](#)

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For Week 9 (through 7 March 2015):

Influenza

- Six cases of NHRC laboratory-confirmed influenza (A/H3) among US military basic trainees.
- Decreasing influenza A/H3 activity at US military recruit sites.

FRI surveillance at all eight U.S. military basic training centers indicated FRI rates were moderately elevated at Fort Benning. [NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update](#)

Swine flu outbreak in India may be more powerful than 2009 global epidemic

11 March – The H1N1 swine flu virus that has killed more than 1,200 people in India this year may be stronger than the 2009 strain that caused 18,000 deaths in 74 countries. Scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) analyzed the two strains of flu and published their findings today in the journal *Cell Host & Microbe*. The researchers said their findings contradict reports from Indian health officials who say this year's strain has not changed from the version that emerged in 2009 and has been circulating around the world during the past six years. The researchers said this year's virus may have acquired mutations that are known to make it more virulent. One of the new mutations is in an amino acid position called D225, which has been linked with increased disease severity. Another mutation, in the T200A position, makes the virus more infectious. And these mutations may make the newer virus more resistant to current H1N1 vaccines. [Healthline](#)

USAPHC: U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report

For the week ending 28 February 2015 (Week 08)

- ERMIC experienced a sharp increase in the number of positive influenza A specimens during week seven but that number significantly decreased during week eight.
- Influenza-like illness (ILI) activity: Army incident ILI outpatient visits in week eight were 8% higher than in the previous week.
- Influenza cases: 14 hospitalized influenza cases were reported to USAPHC in weeks seven and eight: 4 active duty (AD) Service members (SM) and 10 non-AD beneficiaries. Six individuals were vaccinated. To date, 75 cases have been reported during this

influenza season: 17 AD SM and 58 non-AD beneficiaries.

- Viral specimens: During week eight, 464 of 1538 (30%) laboratory specimens tested positive for respiratory pathogens; 233 of 1223 (19%) specimens tested for influenza A were positive. ERMC reported the most influenza A-positive specimens (37%), followed by SRMC and PRMC (both with 18%), NRCM (17%), WRMC (9%), and CENTCOM (0%). [USAPHC U.S. Army Influenza Activity Report](#)

WHO Influenza Update

9 March - Globally, influenza activity remained high in the northern hemisphere with influenza A(H3N2) viruses predominating. Some countries in Africa, Asia and southern part of Europe reported an increased influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 activity.

- In North America, the influenza activity remained elevated following the influenza peak. Influenza A(H3N2) remained the dominant virus detected this season.
- In Europe, the influenza season was at its height, particularly in central and western countries. Influenza A(H3N2) virus continued to predominate this season.
- In northern Africa and the middle East, influenza activity was decreasing in most of the region. Influenza A was predominant in the region.
- In the temperate countries of Asia, influenza activity decreased from its peak in northern China and Mongolia, but continued to increase in the Republic of Korea. Influenza A(H3N2) virus predominated.
- In tropical countries of the Americas, influenza activity remained low in most countries.
- In tropical Asia, influenza activity continued to increase in India and Lao People's Democratic Republic. Influenza activity remained high in southern China, China Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- In the southern hemisphere, influenza activity continued at inter-seasonal levels. [WHO](#)

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VETERINARY/FOOD SAFETY

MERS news: Infections in camel calves

12 March - Saudi Arabia reported two more MERS-CoV cases today, raising its total to 950, while a new study shed more light on infections in camel calves and suggested that avoiding them may be a good way to lower the risk of contracting the virus. ... [A] new study of MERS-CoV in camels suggests that the virus primarily or exclusively infects calves and that avoiding contact with camels less than 2 years old may help prevent human cases. ... Serologic testing showed evidence of MERS-CoV antibodies in more than 96% of camels over 2 years old. MERS-CoV RNA and actual virus isolates were found only in camels less than 4 years old, and they were significantly more common in calves (under 1 year old) than in "subadults" (2 to 4 years old). [CIDRAP](#)

Norovirus genotype profiles associated with foodborne transmission, 1999–2012

April 2015 - ... To estimate the proportion of foodborne infections caused by noroviruses on a global scale, we used norovirus transmission and genotyping information from multiple international outbreak surveillance systems (Noronet, CaliciNet, EpiSurv) and from a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature. The proportion of outbreaks caused by food was determined by genotype and/or genogroup. Analysis resulted in the following final global profiles: foodborne transmission is attributed to 10% (range 9%–11%) of all genotype GII.4 outbreaks, 27% (25%–30%) of outbreaks caused by all other single genotypes, and 37% (24%–52%) of outbreaks caused by mixtures of GII.4 and other noroviruses. When these profiles are applied to global outbreak surveillance data, results indicate that ≈14% of all norovirus outbreaks are attributed to food. [Emerging Infectious Diseases](#)

Researchers connect climate change to food safety

6 March - Climate change can affect our food safety in a number of ways. In a European study, researchers at Wageningen University and Ghent University (Belgium) state that there is often a relationship between long-term changes in temperature and rainfall and vegetable and fruit contamination. For example, flooding may result in increased concentrations of harmful bacteria that can be quickly broken down again by UV light. Similarly, in one region fungi that produce toxins may increase due to global warming, while they decrease in other regions. ... A preliminary study into toxic substances from fungi shows, for example, that an increased risk of contamination of tomatoes may be expected at the end of the 21st century in Poland. In Spain, however, it will be too hot then for this kind of fungi, so the risk of contamination will be lower. ... One of the conclusions from a study into possible forms of adaptation to climate change is that adaptation to future climate change will have to be very different for different countries, sectors and companies. According to this research the focus here will have to be on increasing the adaptive capacity. [ScienceDaily](#)

Strawberries top list of pesticide-laced food: EU report

12 March - Nearly half of food products in Europe contain residues of pesticides, with strawberries the most likely to exceed legal limits, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) said on Thursday. The official EU body also found traces of pesticides in organic foods, though it said its analysis of almost 81,000 food samples found the risk of any negative impact on health was low. But campaign groups said the data was worrying, especially in the cases where residues of more than one pesticide were found. They said the pesticides were mostly fungicides, which are possible carcinogens, and more research was needed into the implications of exposure to more than one. [Reuters](#)

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A sheriff and a doctor team up to map childhood trauma

10 March - ... [Research] shows that kids who have tough childhoods — because of poverty, abuse, neglect, or witnessing domestic violence, for instance — are actually more likely to be sick when they grow up. They're more likely to get diseases like asthma, diabetes and heart disease. And they tend to have shorter lives than people who haven't experienced those difficult events as kids. ... So, by looking at Medicaid records, [Dr. Hardt] made a map that showed exactly where Gainesville children were born into poverty. ... [Sheriff] Darnell had a thermal map of high crime incidence. It showed that the highest concentration of crime in Gainesville was in a square-mile area that exactly overlaid Hardt's poverty map. [Dr. Hardt's] "clinic on wheels" first made it out to the hotspot in 2010, parking right inside one apartment complex there. Patients could walk in without an appointment and get treatment free of charge, approximating the experience of a house call. Today, the mobile clinic gets an average of 5,000 visits from patients per year, in under-served areas all over Gainesville.

[NPR](#)

Circadian surprise: How our body clocks help shape our waistlines



10 March - We've long known about the master clock in our brains that helps us maintain a 24-hour sleep-wake cycle. But in recent years, scientists have made a cool discovery: We have different clocks in virtually every organ of our bodies — from our pancreas to our stomach to our fat cells. ... And it seems we need

regular sleeping and eating schedules to keep all of our clocks in sync. Studies show that if we mess with the body's natural sleep-wake cycle — say, by working an overnight shift, taking a transatlantic flight or staying up all night with a new baby or puppy — we pay the price. Our blood pressure goes up, hunger hormones get thrown off and blood sugar control goes south. [NPR](#)

For young people in rural areas, suicide poses a growing threat

9 March - Suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults, and those who live in rural areas are especially at risk. For young people between the ages of 10 and 24, the suicide rates in rural areas are nearly double those of urban areas. ... The study, which analyzed data from 1996-2010, also found over half of the young people who killed themselves during that time period themselves had used a gun. And the rates for suicide by firearm were especially high in rural areas — about three times the rates for urban areas. ... Why? "For one, rural areas have poor access to mental health services," says Cynthia Fontanella, an associate professor of clinical psychiatry at Ohio State University who led the

study. Around half of all counties in the U.S. don't have a practicing psychiatrist, psychologist or mental health professional – and all of these counties are rural. There also tends to be more stigma around seeking mental health care in rural areas. ... "And even if someone wants to go to a mental health professional, in small towns there's a lack of anonymity in seeking care," she adds. ... Those factors, combined with the fact that gun ownership is more common in rural areas, is likely what puts young adults who live in rural areas at particular risk for suicide, Fontanella says. [NPR](#)

Hand-wringing over bacteria

9 March - **Q.** Does the widespread use of hand sanitizers risk breeding resistant bacteria?

A. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing 60 percent to 95 percent alcohol do not increase the chances of producing resistant bacteria, according to research cited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but some other kinds may do so. ... Hand sanitizers that are not based on alcohol — notably those that rely on substances called chlorhexidine and triclosan — are both less effective and slower to act than alcohol, other studies have found, and both of these agents do present a risk of producing bacterial resistance. Triclosan especially may increase the risk of antibiotic-resistant *E. coli* and *Salmonella*, a 2006 review concluded, possibly presenting a public health hazard with widespread use. [New York Times](#)

Hearing loss, otologic problems more frequent with HIV

8 March - Otologic symptoms and hearing loss are more common among patients with HIV than those without the disease, according to findings published in *JAMA Otolaryngology -- Head & Neck Surgery*. Compared with HIV-negative patients, HIV-positive patients had more otologic symptoms (41 vs. 13; P=0.04), and higher rates of hearing loss (27.2% vs. 5.6%; P=0.04), according to Jean Valentin F. Fokouo, MD, from the University of Yaoundé I in Cameroon. He and colleagues examined the effect of HIV and highly-active antiretroviral treatment (HAART) on hearing function in a Cameroonian population. They examined data were included from 90 HIV-positive case patients (30 HART-naive patients, 30 patients receiving first-line HAART, and 30 receiving second-line HAART) and 90 HIV-negative controls. Participants were aged 15 to 49 years, with no history of hearing loss or treatment with a known ototoxic drug. [Clinical Advisor](#)

Homeopathy not effective for treating any condition, Australian report finds

11 March - Homeopathy is not effective for treating any health condition, Australia's top body for medical research has concluded, after undertaking an extensive review of existing studies. Homeopaths believe that illness-causing substances can, in minute doses, treat people who are unwell. ... These claims have been widely disproven by multiple studies, but the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has for the first time thoroughly reviewed 225 research papers on homeopathy to come up with its position statement, released on Wednesday. "Based on the assessment of the evidence of

effectiveness of homeopathy, NHMRC concludes that there are no health conditions for which there is reliable evidence that homeopathy is effective," the report concluded. "People who choose homeopathy may put their health at risk if they reject or delay treatments for which there is good evidence for safety and effectiveness." [Guardian](#)

Physical labor, hypertension and multiple meds may reduce male fertility

9 March - NIH-funded study analyzes data from more than 450 men attempting to conceive. Working in a physically demanding job, having high blood pressure, and taking multiple medications are among health risks that may undermine a man's fertility, according to a study by researchers at the National Institutes of Health and Stanford University, Stanford, California. The study is the first to examine the relationships between workplace exertion, health, and semen quality as men are trying to conceive. [NIH](#)

Vegetarianism associated with reduced risk for colorectal cancer

10 March - Vegetarian diets are associated with a lower incidence of colorectal cancer, according to a study in *JAMA Internal Medicine*. Nearly 80,000 adults from the Adventist Health Study 2 completed food-frequency questionnaires at baseline and then were divided into five dietary groups: vegan (8% of the population), lacto-ovo vegetarian (29%), pesco-vegetarian (10%), semi-vegetarian (6%), and non-vegetarian (48%). During 7 years' follow-up, researchers documented 490 cases of colorectal cancer. Compared with non-vegetarians, all vegetarians combined had a significantly reduced risk for colorectal cancer (adjusted hazard ratio, 0.78). When examined by type of vegetarian diet, only pesco-vegetarians had a significant reduction in risk (hazard ratio, 0.57). [NEJM Journal Watch](#)

Visiting nurses, helping mothers on the margins



8 March – [The] Nurse-Family Partnership, which helps poor, first-time mothers learn to be parents [and other] home visiting programs, paid for through the Affordable Care Act, are at the heart of a sweeping federal effort aimed at one of the nation's most entrenched social problems: the persistently high rates of infant mortality. The programs have spread to some 800 cities and towns in recent years, and are testing whether successful small-scale efforts to improve children's health by educating mothers can work on a broad national canvas. ... In Tennessee, where home visiting programs have bipartisan support, infant mortality is down by 14 percent since 2010, and sleep deaths dipped by 10 percent from 2012 to 2013. State officials credit a multitude of policies, including the home visits.

[New York Times](#)

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Ghana: Dengue exposures unnoticed among Ghanaian children

10 March - Previous cases of dengue virus transmission may be undetected or misdiagnosed among Ghanaian children with febrile illnesses, according to data recently published in *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. "We believe dengue to be one of many diseases with classic fever and headache symptoms that are currently being misdiagnosed as malaria on a massive scale," Justin Stoler, PhD, MPH, of the University of Miami, said in a press release. "The overprescribing of antimalarials puts evolutionary pressure on the malaria parasite that risks hastening its resistance to artemisinin-based combination therapy — the front-line drugs used to treat malaria in Africa." ... "If these children who were confirmed to be malaria-positive also tested positive for dengue exposure, imagine what the incidence of dengue could be in unconfirmed malaria cases," Stoler said. "If these patterns hold in Ghana, then the misdiagnosis burden in other large urban areas in Africa could approach one-third of all outpatient visits, given the large volume of presumed malaria cases in health care facilities." [Healio](#)

Madagascar: The world's ignoring this humanitarian crisis happening in Madagascar



10 March - These past few months in Madagascar we've had locusts, the black plague, famine, and now floods. Huge floods that have caused a crisis the global media is largely ignoring. The AP reported the effects of our season's first cyclone of 2015 that displaced thousands. Since then, thanks to tropical

storms and an excessively wet rainy season, Madagascar got its monthly average rainfall in just last week alone. ... Madagascar's national disaster management office estimated that over 100,000 people have been affected by the flooding. The office has been known to underestimate counts, particularly of households. ... Over 5,000 houses in the country's high plateau region surrounding the capital, Antananarivo, have been washed away. Dozens of people have died in mudslides that have shut down the one major road running across the country. Water sources have been lost. 6,500 hectares of rice fields (the staple food here in Madagascar) are under water. [RYOT](#)

Poor sanitation spawns Southern Africa cholera outbreak

9 March - Cholera has again reared its ugly head in Southern Africa, infecting nearly 6,000 people in Mozambique, Malawi and now Zimbabwe. Heavy rains have been cited as the main culprit of this outbreak, but poor sanitation continues to plague this region, and human rights advocates say that is a failure of leadership. ... The United Nations'

coordination agency, OCHA, said Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe have seen nearly 6,000 cholera cases since January. [VOA](#)

Uganda: Plan to export medics ‘threatens Uganda’s epidemic response’

11 March - Uganda’s ability to respond to major epidemics will be undermined if plans to send 263 doctors, nurses and midwives to the Caribbean are carried out, civil society activists have warned. The healthcare workers are due to travel on renewable two-year contracts to Trinidad and Tobago under a bilateral agreement the Ugandan government says will improve the skills of those who take part. Uganda suffers from a chronic shortage of health workers – more than 21,000 posts in the sector are currently unfilled – largely because of low pay and poor working conditions. Upon qualifying, hundreds of nurses leave Uganda every year for better-paid jobs in western countries as well as in Rwanda, Kenya and South Africa. “This dangerous plan should be stopped - a government plan to exacerbate brain drain is indefensible. Unless reversed, this move will undermine the fight against maternal mortality, HIV and other leading killers in Uganda,” Asia Russell, the executive director of Health GAP, a local NGO, told IRIN. It will also leave communities more vulnerable to the ravages of outbreaks of infectious diseases such as Ebola and Marburg.

[IRIN](#)

Uganda: UPDF helps KCCA tackle typhoid outbreak

10 March - Efforts to curb the typhoid outbreak in Kampala and neighbouring districts have drawn in officers and medical doctors from the Uganda People’s Defence Forces. The government says the outbreak of the Typhoid fever has spread to 15 districts around the country. [NTV](#)

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USCENTCOM

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

6 March - Between 23 and 25 February 2015, the National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia notified WHO of 10 additional cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection. ... The National IHR Focal Point for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also notified WHO of the death of 2 previously reported MERS-CoV cases. The cases were reported in a previous DON on 23 February (cases n. 19, 37). ... Globally, WHO has been notified of 1040 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including at least 383 related deaths. [WHO](#)

Syria: Chemical exposure in Syria tied to miscarriages, birth defects

12 March - Pregnant women exposed to chemical weapons during the August 2013 attack in Syria were much more likely to miscarry or deliver prematurely, new findings show. The study also found a high rate of serious birth defects among babies whose mothers had been exposed to poison gas. "This is a starting point, and I hope that it opens the door for way more research and study," Dr. Sawsan Jabri, one of the study's authors, told Reuters Health in a telephone interview. ... [Two] researchers reviewed medical records for 211 pregnant women who visited Al Ghouta Hospital in the fall of 2014, including 110 who said they'd been exposed to the chemical attack. Forty-five percent of exposed women miscarried, compared to 14 percent of the unexposed women. The rate of stillbirths among the exposed group was 27.2 per 1,000 births, Dr. Jabri and Dr. Hakeem note, compared to a rate of 12.4 per 1,000 for Syria in 2009. [Reuters](#)

Syria: Health care workers increasingly targeted in Syrian war

11 March - Four years after the start of the Syrian war, health care workers are among the conflict's major targets, with at least 610 medical personnel killed during "deliberate" attacks on hospitals and other medical facilities since 2011, according to a report released Wednesday by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). Medical personnel suffered the biggest casualties in 2014, the report found. One worker was killed every other day — most in the line of duty. The number of attacks on health workers has increased steadily as the war continues, the report added, with snipers positioned near hospitals shooting the wounded, and soldiers detaining those carrying gauze, syringes and other medical supplies coveted by opposition groups. Rebel groups are behind a handful of health worker deaths. But the report noted that the Syrian government has committed 97 percent of the killings, with 139 deaths directly related to torture or execution. [Al Jazeera](#)

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USEUCOM

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

9 March - On 7 March 2015, the National IHR Focal Point for Germany notified WHO of 1 case of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection. The case is a 65-year-old, male, German citizen who returned on 8 February to Germany from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. He developed symptoms on 10 February and was hospitalized in an

intensive care unit one week later. ... Currently, the patient is in a severe but stable condition. ... Globally, WHO has been notified of 1041 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including at least 383 related deaths. [WHO](#)

Ireland: Ireland just accidentally legalised ecstasy, ketamine and magic mushrooms

10 March - For the next 24 hours, a host of Class A drugs are legal (or else in a legal quandary) in Ireland due to an accidental loophole in drug laws. The Dáil will sit tonight to pass emergency legislation after the 1977 Misuse of Drugs Act was found unconstitutional by the Irish Court of Appeal this morning, making the drugs it prohibits (technically) legal. The bill will be rushed through but comes with a provision that states it can only take effect on the day after its signature, placing Ireland in a very grey area with regards to the legality of drugs including ecstasy, ketamine and magic mushrooms until midnight on Thursday. ... 125 substances are thought to not be affected by the judgement and remain as illegal as ever, including cannabis, heroin and cocaine. [Independent](#)

Ukraine: World Bank provides health initiative support in Ukraine

5 March - The World Bank announced on Wednesday that it would be supporting the Serving People, Improving Health Project to help implement health infrastructure improvements and reforms. The bank's board of executive directors approved a loan of \$214.73 million. The project aims to improve first response and emergency services and produce a new funding mechanism to keep hospitals at full capacity and improve their treatment. ... Components of this project also include implementation of frameworks and support for improved health financing and information systems. The Ministry of Health will also begin a public awareness campaign to educate the citizenry about symptoms and preventative measures against cancers and cardiovascular diseases. [CISTran Finance](#)

United Kingdom: Charity: Sharp increase in Afghan veterans treated for PTSD



10 March - The number of British veterans of the Afghanistan conflict who have received treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder has increased dramatically over the last five years, figures from a mental health charity indicate. Combat Stress told ITV News it treated 102 Afghan war veterans for PTSD in

March 2010. Five years later, in March 2015, that number had risen dramatically to 945. Additional statistics on PTSD treatment from Combat Stress also show that on average veterans wait approximately 13 years before seeking treatment for the condition. [ITV](#)

WHO European Region: Measles

6 March - Between 1 January 2014 and 1 March 2015, WHO received notification of over 23 000 cases of measles in the WHO European Region. The most affected country is Kyrgyzstan with over 7 000 cases reported in just the first seven weeks of 2015. Significant numbers of measles cases have also been reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation and Serbia. Measles virus D8 has been the most commonly identified circulating genotype. ... WHO encourages Member States to scale up vaccination against measles across age groups at risk. [WHO](#)

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USNORTHCOM

Canada: Quebec measles outbreak grows to 119 confirmed cases including student

11 March - The number of measles cases in Quebec's Lanaudière region has jumped to 119 and includes a student who attends the École intégrée de Saint-Pierre. Up to 700 students and staff members are potentially at risk of contracting measles after a student attended the school while contagious. The elementary school has a pre-kindergarten program, meaning children as young as four attend the school. [A] protocol has been put in place to mitigate the risk. The protocol involves identifying all the unvaccinated people at the school and offering them the vaccine. Those who refuse will be removed from the school until further notice. ... The first Quebecers to contract measles were exposed while visiting Disneyland in California. Public health officials said Wednesday that all of the 119 cases are related. [CBC News](#)

Mexico/U.S.: Heroin - A deadly industry stretching from Mexico to US



9 March - Over the past month my team and I have followed the heroin corridor from colourful poppy fields in the remote mountains of southern Mexico to Martinsburg, West Virginia - one small American town ravaged by addiction and overdoses. What we saw was that on both sides of the border, the trade has resulted in death and misery. In Mexico that death is usually delivered at the end of a gun in regions ruled by drug gangs. More than 100,000 people have been killed or gone missing since Mexico launched its war against drug cartels in 2006. ... [According] to Antonio Mazzitelli, chief of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Mexico, cartels are growing in

strength as a result of a boom in heroin sales in the US. ... In the US, death is delivered by needle. According to a new report from the Centers for Disease Control, more than 8,200 people in the US died from heroin overdoses in 2013 - nearly three times as many as in 2010. [Al Jazeera](#)

U.S.: Blinding cases of syphilis found on West Coast, now potentially in L.A.

10 March - Public health officials across the West Coast are urging medical professionals to look out for cases of ocular syphilis – a sexually transmitted disease that can cause blindness – after two potential cases in Los Angeles recently. On Thursday, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health issued an advisory for primary and eye-care providers to look out for symptoms associated with the disease, which is usually a complication of primary or secondary syphilis infections. With more than a dozen cases – most of them among gay men – reported between Seattle and San Francisco and now potentially two in Southern California, the AIDS Healthcare Foundation is calling for medical professionals to do more. ... Some of the patients also are HIV positive, including six in San Francisco. In Seattle, two of the patients went blind. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, California's syphilis rate was second in the country behind only Georgia. [Los Angeles Times](#)

U.S.: FDA approves first biosimilar product Zarxio

6 March - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration today approved Zarxio (filgrastim-sndz), the first biosimilar product approved in the United States. Biological products are generally derived from a living organism. They can come from many sources, including humans, animals, microorganisms or yeast. A biosimilar product is a biological product that is approved based on a showing that it is highly similar to an already-approved biological product, known as a reference product. The biosimilar also must show it has no clinically meaningful differences in terms of safety and effectiveness from the reference product. Only minor differences in clinically inactive components are allowable in biosimilar products. [FDA](#)

U.S.: FDA, NIH chiefs to congress - more support, less meddling

11 March - Heads of the FDA and National Institutes of Health told a Senate panel that the public would be best served if Congress would simply give their agencies the support they need to do their jobs, with less heckling from the sidelines. NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, and outgoing FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, MD, came before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on Tuesday to address ways that Congress can accelerate medical innovation. ... "Last year we approved the most new drugs in almost 20 years" -- 51 -- "and more orphan drugs than ever before," she said. Contrary to common perception, her agency is not the primary reason Americans aren't receiving badly needed treatments, she said, and the U.S. is not trailing behind other countries in approvals. ... Hamburg argued that innovation is lagging because of a dearth of basic scientific

knowledge around disease problems. "The biggest obstacle is that scientists do not sufficiently understand the causes of Alzheimer's and other diseases to identify drug targets or identify which patients will benefit from certain drugs," she said. The solution, suggested Hamburg, is robust public-private partnerships "bringing the best minds together to develop the science that we need." Collins echoed Hamburg's position. He said that the most common reason for failure in drug development is that scientists choose the wrong pathways to target. ... The NIH has lost 23% of its purchasing power since 2003, Collins said, forcing the NIH to decline about half of the proposed studies that historically it would have funded. [MedPage Today](#)

U.S.: Medical marijuana's public health lessons — implications for retail marijuana in Colorado

12 March – ... [On] January 1, 2014, Colorado became the first U.S. state to allow sales of recreational, or retail, marijuana. ... One resulting public health concern is a potential increase in adolescents' access to and use of marijuana, given the potential negative health effects on this population. ... Colorado survey data have not revealed increased prevalence. A state survey of middle-school and high school students showed that whereas the proportion perceiving marijuana as highly risky decreased from 58% in 2011 to 54% in 2013, the proportion reporting having used marijuana in the previous 30 days dropped from 22% to 20% over the same period, and the proportion reporting ever having used marijuana decreased from 39% to 37%. Although these changes are not statistically significant, they imply that the levels of perceived risk and use among adolescents remained static at worst as the commercial availability of medical marijuana increased. ... The commercialization of medical marijuana in Colorado has allowed the proliferation of new consumable marijuana products, including candies, lozenges, baked goods, and beverages. ... Little attention was paid to developing standardized dosing levels, guidance for novice users, or an infrastructure for addressing food safety and contamination issues. In addition, legalization of marijuana cultivation for dispensaries facilitated improvement of growing conditions and horticultural practices, which has led to an increase in potency — the percentage of the psychoactive ingredient tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). As a result, THC levels have increased from about 15% to more than 20%. ... [More] patients sought care at a Denver-area children's hospital because of unintentional marijuana use after medical marijuana became commercially available. ... [Issues] of increased availability, diversity and potency of edible products, and impaired driving require further action. [New England Journal of Medicine](#)

U.S.: Mental health coverage unequal in many Obamacare plans

9 March - Insurance coverage for mental and physical illness remains unequal despite promises that Obamacare would help level the playing field, mental health advocates and researchers say. A new study by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that consumer information on a quarter of the Obamacare plans that researchers examined appeared to go against a federal "parity" law designed to stop discrimination in

coverage for people with mental health or addiction problems. This makes it nearly impossible for consumers to find the best plan to cover their mental health needs, the research suggests. "It's critical to monitor whether these regulations are being implemented in a way that fulfills the promise of parity," says associate professor Colleen Barry, who led the study published in the current online issue of the journal *Psychiatric Services*. "Clearly, better monitoring is needed." [USA TODAY](#)

U.S.: More good news on the deficit, this time because of private insurance health premiums

9 March - Estimates for government health care spending keep coming down. A few months ago, we wrote about how a slowing trend in Medicare spending had led federal budget forecasters to make drastic reductions in their estimates of the program's costs. On Monday, they made similar cuts in their forecast of what the federal government will spend on private insurance premiums. The revisions reflect growing evidence that health care spending in the country — which has traditionally grown much more quickly than the overall economy — is entering a new, more moderate era. It is still rising, but not very much anymore. That could eventually be not only a boon for consumers, but it could also have big implications for the federal budget: If the Congressional Budget Office is right, the amount the federal government pays for health insurance in the coming years will be hundreds of billions of dollars lower than it recently forecast, meaning a much smaller federal deficit. [New York Times](#)

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USPACOM

Asia dengue fever update: Malaysia reports more than 27,000 cases to date in 2015

9 March - **Malaysian** health officials, in an updated report, say that the number of dengue fever cases in the country has risen to 27,382 since the beginning of the year after the addition of 222 cases reported on Sunday. ... The dengue related death toll in Malaysia remains at 62, as of the end of February.

In **Vietnam**, health authorities have reported a surge in dengue fever in southern Vietnam so far in 2015 where an increase of 27 percent in cases have been seen as compared to the same period in 2014. Statistics from the Ministry of Health showed that the country has recorded more than 5,200 infections so far this year, including 3,640 infections in February, mostly in the south.

The number of dengue fever cases in **Thailand** is now 3,700 and 3 fatalities, according to a Thai Visa report.

Singapore has reported 1,852 cases and one death since Jan.1. [Outbreak News Today](#)

Australia: Thousands of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans homeless

6 March - Homeless agencies and support groups for veterans are warning of a growing number of former soldiers in crisis as they struggle to adapt to civilian life after their traumatic experiences on the front line. ... In 2009, when the last national Homeless Veterans Survey was conducted, there were 3,000 veterans without a home. ... Organisations like Homelessness NSW and Homeground Services in Victoria estimate homeless veterans represent 8 to 12 per cent of their entire homeless population. In NSW alone there are 25,000 homeless people. ... 'Most [Vietnam] veteran cases didn't present to the Department of Veterans Affairs until they were in their late thirties and early forties, and they all went to war when they were in their early twenties,' he says. 'So there can be a time lag of 15 to 20 years and that doesn't mean people aren't suffering. It just means it takes that long for them to fall over completely before they reach out for help. ... 'Whilst there were 55,000 Vietnam veterans, there are actually 67,000 contemporary veterans. So the scale of the problem we're facing is potentially much larger.' [ABC](#)

Guam: Two more cases of whooping cough announced by public health

11 March - Whooping cough is a growing concern on Guam with two more laboratory confirmed cases announced by the Department of Public Health and Social Services this week. The latest patients are ages 10 and 11. Whooping cough, formally known as pertussis, is a serious disease easily spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing. Anyone can get pertussis but it is especially dangerous for infants and people weakened immune systems. According to DPHSS there have now been eight confirmed cases of the disease on Guam in recent weeks. Three of the cases were in infants. [Pacific News Center](#)

Japan: Microbial soil cleanup at Fukushima

10 March - Proteins from salt-loving, halophilic, microbes could be the key to cleaning up leaked radioactive strontium and caesium ions from the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant incident in Japan. The publication of the X-ray structure of a beta-lactamase enzyme from one such microbe, the halophile *Chromohalobacter* sp. 560, reveals it to have highly selective cesium binding sites. ... The team suggests that protein absorbents related to the beta-lactamase from *Chromohalobacter* might be designed using the techniques of synthetic biology, the most likely approach being to engineer a native protein to make the affinity site described by the team. The genes for such an agent might then be engineered into new breeds of plant that could be grown on the site. With the protein absorbents expressed in plant roots, caesium could be extracted from the soil efficiently, the plants harvested and their new radioactive cargo disposed of safely, leaving behind improved soil. [ScienceDaily](#)

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Brazil passes femicide law to tackle rise in gender killings

10 March - Brazil, where a woman is killed every two hours, is imposing tougher punishments on those who murder women and girls, as part of a government bid to stem a rise in gender killings. President Dilma Rousseff said the new law gave a legal definition to the crime of femicide - the killing of a woman by a man because of her gender - and set out jail sentences of 12 to 30 years for convicted offenders. The law also includes longer jail terms for crimes committed against pregnant women, girls under 14, women over 60 and people with disabilities. Brazil joins 15 other Latin American countries which have brought in laws against femicide in recent years. [Reuters](#)

Chikungunya cases in the Americas rise by more than 9,000

9 March - The number of chikungunya cases in the Americas has grown by 9,038, to 1,259,933, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said in its weekly update late last week. The increase was just 2,802 cases the week before. The total includes 1,231,077 suspected, 25,353 confirmed, and 3,503 imported cases, with most of the imported ones in the United States. Colombia had the highest increase, accounting for the vast majority of new cases, with 7,848. It now has 185,035 suspected and confirmed cases. Other areas with a substantial increase were Puerto Rico, with 418 new cases and 31,165 total, and El Salvador, with 331 new cases and 143,503 in all. [CIDRAP News Scan](#) (second item)

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