Army Public Health Weekly Update

The Army Public Health Update is a collection of articles taken verbatim from public sources to offer awareness of current health issues and the media coverage given to them. The articles do not necessarily represent US Army Medical Department opinions, views, policy, or guidance, and should not be construed or interpreted as being endorsed by the US Army Medical Department.

U.S. Army Public Health Command

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Updated ACIP Tdap Recommendations

Over the last two years the ACIP has continued to expand and update the recommendation for use of the Tdap vaccine. This past March, ACIP released additional provisional recommendations for use of Tdap in adults aged 65 years and older. Current ACIP recommendations include:

Adolescents and adults (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents, child-care providers, and health-care personnel) who have or anticipate having close contact with an infant aged <12 months should receive a single dose of Tdap to protect against pertussis if they have not previously received Tdap. Ideally, these adolescents and adults should receive Tdap at least 2 weeks before beginning close contact with the infant.

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Agent Orange at base in '80s

15 June - The U.S. Marine Corps buried a massive stockpile of Agent Orange at the Futenma air station in Okinawa, possibly poisoning the base's former head of maintenance and potentially contaminating nearby residents and the ground beneath the base, The Japan Times recently learned from interviews with U.S. veterans. The barrels were apparently abandoned in Okinawa at the end of the Vietnam War — when the U.S. government banned the dioxin-laden defoliant for health reasons — and were buried at the installation in the city of Ginowan after the Pentagon ignored requests to safely dispose of them, according to the veterans who served at the installation in the 1970s and 1980s.

Japan Times

Army task force: Female troops need better health care

18 June - The military is falling short in providing equal health care for women on the battlefield even as public pressure grows to allow them a broader role in combat, an Army task force led by female officers concluded. "The health issues and uniform issues are areas that if we are going to be expanding the role of women (in combat), or even maintaining the current role, we need to do a better job at, so that women are equally served," says Army Col. Anne Naclerio, a pediatrician who leads the task force. None of the health problems outlined in the report would bar women from serving in combat but instead create unnecessary physical discomfort, Naclerio says. The Army treated about 450 women for urinary tract infections in Afghanistan last year, according service data. Basic improvements are needed to help women avoid higher rates of urinary tract or vaginal infections, stress-related menstrual difficulties and the chafing, bruising and bleeding caused by ill-fitting body armor designed for men, the task force's report says.

USA Today

Deployed dads' sacrifice tough on the whole family

17 June - When dad is deployed, family life can be tough. Especially on Father's Day. The balance between commitment to family and commitment to country becomes a little more delicate. The absence becomes a little more raw. The uncertainties become a little more frightening...About 44 percent of military members had families with children in 2010, according to Department of Defense statistics. Military members, meanwhile, are deploying for longer periods of time than almost ever before. The Department of Defense reported in 2010 that, "of the approximately 1 million service member parents who have ever deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, 48 percent served at least two tours." Stars and Stripes
Degenerative disc disease, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2001-2011

May 2012 - Degeneration of intervertebral discs is a common disorder that often leads to pain syndromes and mechanical dysfunction of the spine. Between 2001 and 2010, 131,986 active component service members received diagnoses of degenerative disc disease (DDD) during a hospitalization or at least two ambulatory visits (overall crude incidence rate: 951.4 per 100,000 person-years [p-yrs]). Annual crude incidence rates more than doubled during the surveillance period (2001: 614.9 per 100,000 p-yrs; 2010: 1,347.8 per 100,000 p-yrs). An estimated 68,247 days of lost duty time were attributed to DDD-specific diagnoses. Among service members diagnosed with DDD who subsequently deployed in support of overseas combat operations, more than two-thirds experienced exacerbations of their condition while deployed, although only 1.7 percent were medically evacuated. Deployed service members with DDD were more likely than a deployed comparison group to be medically evacuated for any cause. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report

DoD could renew push to restrict personal weapons

21 June - The Pentagon appears ready to take on gun rights advocates this year in order to give commanders the ability to restrict troops at high risk of suicide from keeping their personal firearms easily available in their homes. Some Army leaders had previously encouraged troops to use gun locks on their weapons at home, or recommended that high-risk troops lock up their personal weapons on base if they were believed to be high risk. But the National Rifle Association and gun advocates objected and Congress barred that practice in last year’s defense authorization bill. But with military suicides continuing to climb, key leaders are not giving up on regaining a tool they considered helpful in saving some troops’ lives. Military.com

Glitch blocks funds for military suicide prevention

14 June - A legal technicality is preventing the Pentagon from spending millions of dollars set aside to curb suicides, even as suicide in the ranks is on the rise, a nonprofit advocacy group says. The Pentagon has not spent much of some $8 million Congress has provided for suicide prevention because the funds are allocated only for “in-house,” or hospital, care — not education and outreach programs, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The funds, allocated to the Defense Health Program, can be used only after a service member has attempted suicide and is receiving treatment, not before. “The services should have the authority to spend it on prevention efforts and not just health care delivery,” Charles Curie, a foundation board member, told the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on defense last week. “Requiring additional funding to be spent on treatment is not going to help get in front of the problem.” Washington Times
Post deployment care for returning combat veterans

31 May - Since September 11, 2001, 2.4 million military personnel have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. To date, roughly 1.44 million have separated from the military and approximately 772,000 of these veterans have used VA health care. Combat deployments impact the physical, psychological, and social health of veterans. Given that many veterans are receiving care from non-VA providers, it is important that all community health care workers be familiar with the unique health care needs of this patient population, which include injuries associated with blast exposures (including mild traumatic brain injury), as well as a variety of mental health conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Other important health concerns are chronic musculoskeletal pain, medically unexplained symptoms, sequelae of environmental exposures, depression, suicide, substance abuse, sleep disturbances, and impairments in family, occupational and social functioning. Elevated rates of hypertension and tobacco use remind us that deployment may result not only in immediate impacts on health, but also increase risk for chronic disease, contributing to a growing public health burden. This paper provides a comprehensive review of these health concerns and offers practical management guidelines for primary care providers. Journal of General Internal Medicine

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GLOBAL

Adding nevirapine to HIV regimen halves newborn transmission rate

20 June - Adding the drug nevirapine to the regimen given to newborns of women diagnosed with HIV shortly before or during labor halves the newborns’ risk of contracting the virus, according to findings by a National Institutes of Health research network. The researchers found that the rate of mother-to-child HIV transmission around the time of delivery was 2.2 percent among infants who received the standard drug zidovudine combined with nevirapine, compared with 4.8 percent among infants treated with zidovudine alone. The researchers also found a reduced rate of transmission (2.4 percent) among infants treated with a three-drug combination: zidovudine, nelfinavir and lamivudine. However, infants given the two-drug combination were less likely to have neutropenia than were those on the three drug regimen. (Neutropenia is a blood disorder consisting of low levels of neutrophils, a type of infection fighting white blood cell.) The two drug combination is also less expensive and easier to administer than the three drug combination. NIH News
Antibody combo treatment for Ebola promising in primate trial

14 June - Canadian researchers yesterday in *Science Translational Medicine* reported using monoclonal antibodies to treat Ebola infection in macaques. Currently, there are no vaccines or therapies for Ebola infection, which has a mortality rate of up to 90%. The researchers used three neutralizing monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) made in mice directed against the Ebola envelope glycoprotein. All four primates survived when given three doses 3 days apart 24 hours after a lethal challenge with the deadly Zaire strain of the virus. When the treatment was given after 48 hours, two of four monkeys recovered. Follow-up blood tests suggested that the survivors showed humoral and cell-mediated response against the virus. Researchers noted that the strategy is promising, because earlier therapy trials were only fully effective when given within 1 hour of infection, well before most people come to a clinic with symptoms. The group noted that it's unclear if protection would be sustained against a second exposure to Ebola virus or to different strains of the virus. In a Canadian Press (CP) story on the study, researcher Heinz Feldmann, MD, PhD, chief scientist at a biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) National Institutes of Health lab, said that monoclonal antibody treatment might be safer than a vaccine but perhaps more expensive. *CIDRAP News Scan*

Global weight gain more damaging than rising numbers

17 June - Researchers say that increasing levels of fatness around the world could have the same impact on global resources as an extra billion people. The team estimated the total weight of people on the planet and found that North America had the highest average. Although only 6% of the global population live there, it is responsible for more than a third of the obesity. The research is published in the journal *BMC Public Health*. In their report, the researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine calculate the weight of the global population at 287 million tonnes. They estimate that 15 million tonnes of this mass is due to people being overweight, and 3.5 million tonnes due to obesity. *BBC News*

Heart attacks can trigger post-traumatic stress

21 June - When people think of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), they’re apt to picture combat veterans or the victims of violence and sexual assault. But new research suggests post-traumatic stress is also common following another kind of harrowing experience: heart attacks. As many as 1 in 8 people who survive a heart attack will go on to develop symptoms of PTSD, a new analysis has found. And to make matters worse, PTSD symptoms appear to increase the risk of having a second heart attack or dying prematurely. *TIME*
CDC: Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report

During week 23 (week ending 9 June), 6.3% of all deaths reported through the 122-Cities Mortality Reporting System were due to P&I. This percentage was below the epidemic threshold of 7.1% for week 23. FluView

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

21 June - During weeks 23–24/2012, all sixteen countries reporting experienced low-intensity influenza activity. Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview

Naval Health Research Center: Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

For the week ending 16 June 2012, the febrile respiratory illness rate at all eight U.S. military basic training centers was at or below expected values. NHRC Febrile Respiratory Illness Surveillance Update

Project boosts flu surveillance in Africa

15 June - A 1-year project to enhance flu surveillance in several sub-Saharan African countries wrapped up at the end of 2011 and yielded useful lessons, according to a report yesterday from AlertNet. The project, called the Strengthening Influenza Sentinel Surveillance in Africa (SISA), focused on establishing new systems in Angola and Sierra Leone and strengthening existing ones in Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, and Zambia. The project was a collaboration between Agence de Medecine Preventive and WHO. Researchers. The 2009 H1N1 pandemic exposed weak surveillance systems in that part of the world. One of the SISA program leaders said an important lesson was to keep sentinel surveillance systems, such as the new one in Sierra Leone, small but functioning. CIDRAP

WHO report sums up Northern Hemisphere flu season

15 June - The 2011-12 flu season in most temperate countries of the Northern Hemisphere started later than usual, except for North Africa, and was mild in many countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) said today in a wrap-up report. The circulating flu strains varied widely by country and even by region, according to WHO report, which appeared in its Weekly Epidemiological Record... CIDRAP
PANDEMIC AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Bird flu pandemic in humans could happen any time

21 July - The world has yet to see a form of the deadly bird flu virus that could spread easily between people and cause a global outbreak - but that doesn't mean it won't happen, scientists said on Thursday. After studying 15 years of data on bird flu viruses in the wild, researchers said some strains were already part way along the road to acquiring a handful of mutations needed to change into a form that could cause a devastating human pandemic. "The remaining... mutations could evolve in a single human host, making a virus evolving in nature a potentially serious threat," Derek Smith of Britain's University of Cambridge, who led the research, told reporters. Reuters

Bird flu research that stoked fears is published

21 June - The more controversial of two papers describing how the lethal H5N1 bird flu could be made easier to spread was published on Thursday, six months after a scientific advisory board suggested that the papers' most potentially dangerous data be censored. The paper, by scientists at Erasmus Medical Center in the Netherlands, identified five mutations apparently necessary to make the bird flu virus spread easily among ferrets, which catch the same flus that humans do. Only about 600 humans are known to have caught H5N1 in the last decade as it circulated in poultry and wild birds, mostly in Asia and Egypt, but more than half died of it. The paper’s publication, in the journal Science, ended an acrimonious debate over whether such results should ever be released. Critics said they could help a rogue scientist create a superweapon. Proponents said the world needed to identify dangerous mutations so countermeasures could be designed. New York Times

Egypt produces first locally made avian flu vaccine for poultry

13 June - Given this background, a welcome announcement was made yesterday by the National Research Centre (NRC) in Cairo of the first vaccine against what is popularly known as ‘bird flu’ to be produced by Egyptian scientists. The Government has been importing vaccine at high prices so as to fight this national problem and the new vaccine is now available in the local market at LE305 (about $60) for 100 doses. The conference was attended by the Minister of Scientific Research Dr Nadia Zakhary, head of Veterinary Services Authority Dr Osama Selim and the head of NRC Dr Ashraf Shaalan. The scientists stressed that the vaccine produced by the NRC research team has proved its effectiveness, reaching 95 per cent. The imported vaccine achieved an efficacy rate ranging from 20 to 25 per cent, because of the type of virus hitting poultry in Egypt and the vaccine being produced far from the local environment. Egyptian Gazette
Consumer Reports scrutinizes antibiotic use in food production

20 June - Urvashi Rangan, director of Consumer Safety at Consumer Reports - an independent product-testing organization - explained the primary issue at hand is the use of antibiotics in animal production. She said the misuse of antibiotics is leading to a "public health crisis."... The meat and poultry business is America's number one user of antibiotics. Rangan said the issue is not the antibiotics on the meat when it's consumed. She said the primary issue is the use of antibiotics on farms to keep healthy animals healthy, especially in industrial-scale confined animal feed operations. "It's really a sort of an artificial system," she said. "The bacteria on the farm (is) becoming more and more resistant (to the antibiotics). And when that (bacteria) goes downstream and a consumers is exposed to that later on, they can get a disease that's resistant to being treated by antibiotics and it can become harder and harder to treat those diseases in people." CBS News

Salmonella outbreak linked to dog food grows to 22 cases in 13 states

14 June - The Salmonella outbreak caused by dry dog food has now grown to 22 cases in 13 states and Canada, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said yesterday. The outbreak has grown by five cases and four states (California, Illinois, New York, and South Carolina) since the last CDC update on May 11. Two of the current cases are in Canada. Among the 17 case-patients with available information, 6 (35%) were hospitalized, and no deaths have been reported. The outbreak is caused by a Salmonella Infantis strain. Multiple brands of dry dog food produced by Diamond Pet Foods at a plant in South Carolina have been linked to some of the cases, and the company has recalled 11 brands of its dog food. A CDC "Note from the Field" in today's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) notes that this is the second US Salmonella outbreak linked to dry pet food. The first, involving cat food and dog food, occurred in 2006 to 2008. CIDRAP News Scan

The dirty dozen: Eco-group reveals lists of pesticide heavy fruits and veggies

20 June - Every year, the Environmental Working Group releases a Shopper’s Guide. The guide has information on 45 different conventional fruits and vegetables and their pesticide loads. At the top of the list — the produce found to contain the highest amount of pesticides — is the Dirty Dozen. These are the 12 foods that they recommend consumers always purchase in their organic form. Apples are at the top of the 2012 Shopper’s Guide for the second year in a row. The EWG guide is based on the group's analysis of pesticide residue testing data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). At the bottom of the list is the Clean Fifteen, 15 foods that have the lowest pesticide load. Forbes
Wounded working dogs receive skilled care

14 June - By now, most everyone knows that the warriors in Afghanistan consist of both the human and canine kind. Military working dogs have been with service members since day one of the current contingency operations and will likely be there until the last. And just as the human warriors are regularly exposed to the many potential hazards posed by the enemy, so too are the dogs. Indeed, some MWDs have suffered serious wounds that require timely and skilled medical care. While some units not under the U.S. Army Public Health Command umbrella provide the initial resuscitative treatment and stabilization of wounded dogs, definitive care is performed by USAPHC elements. Dogs wounded in theater will generally first be evacuated to Dog Center Europe in Vogelweh, Germany. DCE assesses the dog’s condition and provides the appropriate treatment, surgery or other procedure for the particular injury. NewsMilitary.com

WELLNESS

As heat builds, take steps to protect yourself

20 June - As the first major heat wave of the summer engulfs the continental United States, health experts are urging people to take special precautions when dealing with scorching temperatures and oppressive humidity. One of the most important things to do is to drink plenty of water throughout the day to avoid dehydration, said Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Sports drinks that contain electrolytes such as sodium and potassium with small amounts of glucose may help to combat dehydration, Glatter noted, but caffeinated beverages and products with high amounts of sugar can worsen dehydration. Because children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to dehydration, they should be checked on often and encouraged to drink lots of fluids, he added. Medline Plus

Drunk drivers show risky lifetime drinking habits

21 June - Many people convicted of drunk driving may have a lifelong struggle with risky drinking habits, a new study suggests. In interviews with 700 adults with a drunk-driving conviction, researchers found nearly half had either been drinking heavily for the long haul, or had fallen back into heavy drinking after trying to cut down for a time. What's more, between one-fifth and one-third of those chronically risky drinkers met the definitions for alcohol or drug dependence, or for mental health conditions like depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Reuters
Legal medical marijuana poses risks to teens

21 June - A remarkable 74% of teens in two Colorado substance treatment programs admit to use of diverted marijuana... The study took place in Colorado, which houses approximately 40% of legal marijuana facilities in the U.S. and in which 2.3% of adults have registry cards for use of medical marijuana. The 164 subjects (age range, 14–18 years) from two substance-use treatment programs participated in comprehensive assessments that included items on diversion of legal marijuana... Of the patients, 74% had used marijuana diverted from legal medical prescriptions; 80% of these users were male. Only one participant had a legal marijuana registry card. Diverters and nondiverters started marijuana use at a mean age of 12 years. JournalWatch

Lonely? Your health may suffer

18 June - Loneliness and isolation can affect your quality of life -- and maybe your quantity of life, too. According to a pair of studies published today in the Archives of Internal Medicine, living alone -- or even just feeling lonely -- may increase a person's risk of premature death. One study followed nearly 45,000 people ages 45 and up who had heart disease or a high risk of developing the condition. Those who lived alone, the study found, were more likely to die from heart attacks, strokes, or other heart complications over a four-year period than people living with family or friends, or in some other communal arrangement. The risk was highest in middle-aged people, just 14% of whom lived alone. Solo living increased the risk of heart problems and early death by 24% among people ages 45 to 65, and by only 12% among people ages 66 to 80. And there was no association at all in people age 80 and older, a group in which living alone is common. CNN

Study: It's never too late to quit smoking

15 June - It's never too late to quit smoking, according to a new analysis of thousands of smokers, which finds people over 60 who give up the habit have a reduced risk of death. Smoking is a known risk factor for many diseases, including many forms of cancer and cardiovascular disease. But most studies on the health effects of smoking involve middle-aged people. The latest analysis by German researchers looked at the health impacts of smoking in those over the age of 60. Voice of America

Traffic noise associated with heart attacks

21 June - Exposure to traffic noise is significantly associated with heart attacks, according to new research. The new study, led by Mette Sorensen on the Danish Cancer Society, showed a clear relationship between traffic noise and heart attacks, with a 12% higher risk per 10 decibels of noise, based on 50,614 study participants over ten years. The exact reason for this relationship is not yet known, but may be due to increased stress and sleep disturbances associated with high traffic noise. Sorensen suggested choosing a room with a low exposure to traffic noise for sleeping in, or insulating one's house against noise. It is also possible for officials to pave highways with low-noise asphalt, she said. “The real
danger with noise pollution is that most people don’t realize they are experiencing it,” Sorenson said. “You might wake up thinking that you had a quiet night, but when you look at it in a lab, you see that your sleep stages have been disturbed.” ABC Wham

**Vitamin D plus calcium tied to longer life: study**

17 June - Older people who take vitamin D and calcium supplements may live a bit longer than their peers, according to an international review of several studies covering more than 70,000 people. Researchers writing in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology found that older people who were given the supplements were 9 percent less likely to die over three years than those given placebo pills. Vitamin D alone had no impact on death rates. A 9 percent dip in death risk over a three year period might sound small, but lead researcher Lars Rejnmark said that effect is "at least as pronounced" as the benefits linked to cholesterol-lowering statins and blood pressure drugs. Reuters

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**USAFRICOM**

**Africa: Waking up to the math of malaria**

21 June - To the minerals and mobiles underpinning Africa’s pacy growth over the last decade, you may soon be able to add malaria - or at least its absence. Besides the huge human cost imposed on the continent - 90 percent of the 655,000 deaths estimated worldwide in 2010 - the mosquito-borne disease is an economic millstone, draining public and private resources and hammering productivity. According to a 2001 study co-authored by U.S. economist Jeffrey Sachs, the disease imposes an annual “growth penalty” of 1.3 percentage points on afflicted states, which includes most of those south of the Sahara apart from South Africa. Reuters

**Zimbabwe: Japan funds polio, measles vaccination**

18 June - Japan has provided funds to immunize about two million children in Zimbabwe against polio and measles as well as provide for Vitamin A supplements. The national immunization week is part of efforts by Zimbabwe, working with U.N. agencies, to reduce child mortality rates in the country. The weeklong immunization program, which launched Monday, was funded by the Japanese government. However, the money went to the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, instead of Zimbabwe’s government because of fears of corruption. Voice of America

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Iran: Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever, background

18 June - During the past 2 years, 14 people have died in Iran as a result of sporadic cases of Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF), the Jam-e Jam Persian language daily reported. The importation of livestock to Iran from eastern borders has been the cause of the spread of the disease, which has affected 114 people so far, of whom 14 have died. The highest number of cases has been reported in Sistan-Baluchestan Province. During 1999-2011, some 610 cases of the disease have been reported, which has led to the death of 60 people. CCHF is a viral disease and it has affected Yazd, Fars, and Sistan-Baluchestan provinces so far, he said. CCHF is a widespread tickborne viral disease that affects domestic and wild animals and may also be transmitted to humans. ProMED-mail

Pakistan: Taliban commander bans polio vaccinations in tribal area of Pakistan

18 June - A Taliban commander in North Waziristan, part of Pakistan’s tribal belt, has banned polio vaccinations in the region until the US stops drone strikes there, the New York Times reported today. The commander, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, fears that the CIA could use the vaccination effort as a cover for spying, as it did in the case of Shakil Afridi, the Pakistan doctor who helped track Osama bin Laden. A United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) official said health workers had hoped to reach 161,000 children younger than 5 in a vaccination drive scheduled to begin Jun 20 in the tribal belt. Dr. Muhammad Sadiq, surgeon general for North Waziristan, told the Times that the campaign would have to be canceled because of the ban. Din Muhammad, a journalist based in the neighboring South Waziristan tribal agency, said the main Taliban commander there was also planning to block polio vaccinations, according to the Times. Pakistan, one of three countries where polio is still endemic, has had 22 cases so far this year, versus 52 at this time last year. CIDRAP

Euro lung testing call

21 June - European experts want lung testing to become a "basic right" as a major global conference on the topic convenes in the UK. The COPD8 conference is taking place in Birmingham and next Wednesday has been declared World Spirometry Day with backing from the European Lung Foundation. An organisation called the European COPD coalition says the EU could establish spirometry lung testing across Europe and push for better training for healthcare professionals...Earlier diagnosis stands to reduce the burden of the disease considerably, both for patients and the health service. The need for quality
spirometry testing as standard, and adequate training for the clinicians who deliver it, must finally be put on the agenda.” European Lung Foundation chair Monica Fletcher said: “For too long lung diseases like COPD have been ignored at a European level with other diseases taking priority. With up to ten per cent of adults in Europe living with COPD, it’s time for this to change. Englemed

United Kingdom: Fast food lunches for poor

21 June - Britain’s poorest children enjoy a diet high in fast food, researchers warn today. As many as ten per cent of children in the poorest neighbourhoods visit a fast food outlet daily, researchers found. And 50 per cent would expect to eat fast food at least twice a week. The findings come from a study of children aged between 11 and 14 in the Tower Hamlets area of London. The children attended schools which allowed them to leave the premises at lunch-time. So, although 61 per cent were entitled to free school meals, many said they skipped these to head for a fast food outlet for lunch. About 30 per cent of the children were overweight or obese. The study, reported in BMJ Open, involved some 193 children of which nearly half were of Asian background. Researchers found that girls mostly sought to limit their consumption by buying only chips. Researcher Dr Mei-Yen Chan, a food specialist at Newcastle University, UK, writes: “These children are exposed to an environment that is likely to cause obesity, and it is not surprising that in this situation, many of these children are already overweight or obese, and will likely become obese as adults. Englemed

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USNORTHCOM

U.S.: Colorado firefighters hampered by winds, heat -- and meteors

21 June - Firefighters in Colorado have battled the odds in trying to contain a blaze that has burned uncontrolled across 100 square miles of forest -- encountering precarious winds, heat and fatigue. On Wednesday, they contended with a new force: meteors. Authorities grounded firefighting aircraft as a precautionary measure after several reported meteor sightings near the High Park fire area they were trying to contain. Chaffee County Sheriff W. Peter Palmer told the Los Angeles Times that his office received four reports of meteors striking the ground.” Los Angeles Times
U.S.: FDA approves meningococcal-Hib combo vaccine for young kids

15 June - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) yesterday approved a GlaxoSmithKline combination vaccine to protect infants and toddlers against meningococcal disease and Haemophilus influenzae. The vaccine, Menhibrix, is designed to prevent Neisseria meningitidis serogroups C and Y and H influenzae type b (Hib) in children 6 weeks through 18 months old, according to an FDA release. "There is now a combination vaccine that can be used to prevent potentially life-threatening Hib disease and two types of meningococcal disease in children. It is the first meningococcal vaccine that can be given starting as young as 6 weeks of age," Karen Midthun, M.D., director of the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said in the release. The agency said the effectiveness of the vaccine was based on immune response in several hundred US infants and toddlers. The FDA said in the release that, for the Hib component of the vaccine, immune responses were "comparable to immune responses in infants and toddlers who received an FDA-approved vaccine against invasive Hib disease." CIDRAP

U.S. kids getting more ADHD drugs, fewer antibiotics

18 June - The number of drugs dispensed to U.S. minors has dropped slightly over the past decade, bucking the rise in prescriptions to adults, according to a government report out Monday. Antibiotics use fell by 14 percent, suggesting efforts to curb rampant overuse of the drugs “may be working,” researchers from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) write in the journal Pediatrics. Experts say antibiotics are commonly used to treat infections caused by viruses, although they only work against bacteria. That has fueled the growth of drug-resistant superbugs. The new report also found an uptick in the use of some drugs in children, with stimulants for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, leading the pack. Reuters

U.S.: New CDC test for dengue approved

20 June - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed a new diagnostic test to detect the presence of dengue virus in people with symptoms of dengue fever or dengue hemorrhagic fever. The test, called the CDC DENV-1-4 Real Time RT PCR Assay, has been authorized by the Food and Drug Administration for use in the United States and can be performed using equipment and supplies many public health laboratories already use to diagnose influenza. The new test will help diagnose dengue within the first seven days after symptoms of the illness appear, which is when most people are likely to see a health care professional and the dengue virus is likely to be present in their blood. The test can identify all four dengue virus types. CDC
U.S.: Previous HIV testing among adults and adolescents newly diagnosed with HIV infection

22 June - ...To assess previous HIV testing patterns among adults and adolescents newly diagnosed with HIV infection, CDC analyzed data for the period 2006–2009 from 18 jurisdictions participating in HIV incidence surveillance through CDC’s National HIV Surveillance System (NHSS) (2).† This report describes the results of that analysis, which indicated that among adults and adolescents for whom testing history information (THI) was available, 41% were diagnosed with HIV infection at their first HIV test, and 59% had a negative test at some point before HIV diagnosis. Groups with the highest percentage of persons testing HIV-negative ≤12 months before HIV diagnosis included those aged 13–29 years (33%), males with HIV transmission attributed to male-to-male sexual contact (29%), and whites (28%). Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

U.S.: Stagnating life expectancies

21 June - Despite modest gains in lifespan over the past century, the United States still trails many of the world’s countries when it comes to life expectancy, and its poorest citizens live approximately five years less than more affluent persons, according to a new study from Rice University and the University Colorado at Boulder. The study, “Stagnating Life Expectancies and Future Prospects in an Age of Uncertainty,” used time-series analysis to evaluate historical data on U.S. mortality from the Human Mortality Database. The study authors reviewed data from 1930 through 2000 to identify trends in mortality over time and forecast life expectancy to the year 2055. Their research will be published in an upcoming issue of Social Science Quarterly. Science Daily

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Japan officials failed to use US data on spread of Fukushima radiation

19 June - Japanese authorities failed to disclose U.S. data about the spread of radiation from a crippled nuclear plant last year, leaving some evacuees fleeing in the same direction as the emissions, according to several media sources. News that Japan’s nuclear watchdog and the science and technology ministry sat on the information collected by U.S. military aircraft -- another sign of the chaos at the time — is likely to add to mistrust of nuclear power just days after the government approved the restart of two idled reactors. Japanese Industry Minister Yukio Edano apologized Tuesday for the nation’s failure to make use of the data, according to the Asahi Shimbun newspaper. Stars and Stripes
Myanmar: 30,000 without food, shelter in clashes

14 June - Tens of thousands of displaced Muslim Rohingyas and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists were in need of food, water and shelter in northwestern Myanmar on Thursday after fleeing the country’s worst sectarian clashes in years. Houses were burnt down late on Wednesday in two villages near the Bangladesh border, but there were no reports of further deaths. Scores of people are feared to have been killed in the rioting that broke out in Rakhine state on June 8... The violence had killed 29 people as of Thursday and displaced more than 30,000, said Htein Lin, secretary of the Ministry for Border Affairs. Egyptian Gazette

Southeast Asia: Dengue cases up, WHO reports

15 June - Most Southeast Asian countries have seen increases in dengue cases this year in spite of a regional campaign to combat the mosquito-borne disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) said today, according to The Nation. Dengue cases more than quadrupled in Cambodia, with 4,052 so far this year, compared with 862 for the same period in 2011. Laos reported 778, up from 526 in 2011, and Malaysia logged 10,352 cases, up from 8,720. The total in the Philippines through Jun 2 was 32,193 cases, up from 30,989 for the same stretch in 2011, but dengue-related deaths were down from 201 to 195. The WHO reported, however, that Singapore and Vietnam have seen fewer cases this year. "Dengue remains a serious public health threat with the Asia-Pacific region bearing 75% of the current global disease burden," the WHO's Western Pacific Regional Office said in a statement. CIDRAP

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Haiti: Aid group sees drop in cholera cases

15 June - The director of an international aid group says the Haitian capital is seeing a dramatic drop in the number of cholera cases as the Caribbean nation leaves the annual rainy season. Thierry Goffeau of Doctors Without Borders says his health group has seen the number of weekly cases in Port-au-Prince jump from 708 in late April to 1,354 in late May. The number of cases in the capital dropped to 528 last week. This drop was mirrored at a cholera treatment center in a densely populated neighborhood in Port-au-Prince. Patients filled an 80-bed facility through the month of May. The same facility now has about 10 patients. Despite the decline, cholera continues to cause havoc. Officials say the waterborne disease has killed more than 7,200 people and sickened another 555,000. Palm Beach Post

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