

USACHPPM

HEALTH INFORMATION OPERATIONS (HIO) UPDATE

20 August 2004

The HIO Update provides information regarding global medical and veterinary issues of interest to the United States (US) Army. The update does not attempt to analyze the information as to its strategic or tactical impact on the US Army and should not be regarded as a medical intelligence product. Medical intelligence products are available from the [Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center](#). The information in the HIO Update should provide an increased awareness of current and emerging health-related issues.

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HOT TOPICS

Anti-Bacterial Additive Found In Maryland Streams

18 August – The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health News Center reported that a toxic chemical used in hand soaps, cleaners and other personal care products to kill germs is deposited and remains in the environment long after the products are used. The chemical, triclocarban, is a non-agricultural polychlorinated phenyl urea pesticide that has been widely used for decades to kill bacteria. The researchers were among the first to detect concentrations of triclocarban in rivers and influent of wastewater treatment facilities. In some instances, they detected concentrations of triclocarban in waterways at levels 20 fold higher than previously reported. The study furnishes the first peer-reviewed environmental data of triclocarban contamination in U.S. water resources. Using a new method to detect triclocarban, researchers found the disinfectant in all Maryland streams examined. More research is needed to determine whether the environmental contamination discovered translates into human exposure and any corresponding long-term risks. [View Article](#)

Body's Own Defense against H. Pylori, Cause of Stomach Ulcer and Cancer

12 August – EurekAlert reported that a human glycoprotein inhibits *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), the bacterium that causes [stomach ulcers](#) and is linked with 90% of [stomach cancers](#). Over fifty percent of the world's population is infected with *H. pylori*, yet only 2% are afflicted with stomach ulcers and only 1% with stomach cancer. Researchers isolated mucin from the upper and lower layers lining the stomach and found a key difference: surface-derived mucin actively supported *H. pylori* growth, while mucins from the second layer inhibited growth. *H. pylori* in the presence of alpha 1,4-linked N-acetylglucosamine lost its shape, became immobile, and eventually died. This cell-growth immobilizing effect is very similar to the effect of antibiotics, and presents a target for the design of drugs to treat stomach ulcers and prevent stomach cancer linked with *H. pylori*. [View Article](#)

Brain Diseases Treble in 20 Years

15 August – The Independent reported that deaths from brain diseases such as [Alzheimer's](#), [Parkinson's](#) and [motor neuron disease](#) have soared in the past two decades. Researchers are blaming the increase on higher levels of pesticides, industrial chemicals, car exhaust and other

pollutants. A study finds that dementia rates have trebled in men and increased by 90 per cent among women. In the late 1970s, there were about 3,000 deaths a year from brain diseases in England and Wales. At the end of the last decade, that figure had risen to 10,000. Cases of Parkinson's disease and motor neuron disease increased by 50 per cent - similar to that of cancer cases over a similar period. However, the increase was generally lower in Japan, leading to speculation that diet could also be a factor. The researchers said their figures took into account the fact diagnoses may have improved and that people were living longer. [View Article](#)

Bystander CPR Best Way to Save Lives from Heart Attacks

11 August - CBC News reported that the survival rate from [heart attacks](#) would be much higher if early access to care, early CPR and defibrillation within eight minutes were available. Dr. Ian Stiell, a researcher and emergency physician at the Ottawa Hospital and his team studied over 10,000 heart patients over 10 years across Ontario. "We found that in the typical setting such as we see in Ontario, the advanced care paramedic program did not make a difference," said Stiell. "On the other hand, we found that early CPR by bystanders and rapid defibrillation by firefighters were both terribly important and make a huge difference to survival." Stiell said governments should put more money into public training for CPR and more automated defibrillation in the community. [View Article](#)

Diesel Exhaust Exposure Raises Ovarian Cancer Risk

13 August – Reuters reported that the risk of [ovarian cancer](#) increases with increased exposure to diesel exhaust. The researchers assessed the risk posed by a variety of cancers that may be associated with engine exhaust exposure. These included leukemia and cancers of the throat, ovaries, testes, kidney and bladder. A record linkage with the Finnish Cancer Registry was used to identify 2198 throat cancers, 5082 ovarian cancers, 387 testicular cancers, 7366 kidney cancers, 8110 bladder cancers and 4562 leukemias. Using data from the population census in 1970, they calculated cumulative exposure (CE) to exposure to diesel and gasoline engine exhausts. Individuals with the highest CE had more than 3.5 times the risk of ovarian cancer. [View Article](#)

Earth in 2050: Expect 9 Billion Humans

17 August – MSNBC.com reported that many of the world's largest industrialized nations will lose population between now and 2050 as low birth rates, struggling economies and curbs on immigration stifle growth. The annual study by the private Population Reference Bureau found that, while the world's population will increase nearly 50 percent by mid-century, Japan will lose 20 percent of its population in the next 45 years, while Russia, Germany and Italy will also see declines. The United States is the biggest exception among developed countries, with its population forecast to rise by 43 percent from 293 million now to 420 million at mid-century. Still, most of the world's population growth will come in developing nations. China, currently the world's most populous nation at 1.3 billion, would see an overall 10 percent increase between now and 2050 to over 1.4 billion in 2050. By 2050, India is expected to overtake China, rising almost 50 percent from under 1.1 billion now to 1.6 billion at mid-century. Nigeria's population is expected to nearly triple in size to 307 million, while Bangladesh would double to 280 million. The trends could change depending on the how successful doctors are in treating AIDS infections and reducing infant mortality rates and, how prevalent contraceptive use and family planning become in developing nations. [View Article](#) [View 2004 World Population Data Sheet](#)

Graft Hope for Dialysis Patients

15 August – BBC News reported that scientists are developing a device which they say could improve the lives of [kidney dialysis](#) patients. Most have a synthetic tube inserted under the skin, where they

are "hooked up" to a machine every few days. But this places huge pressure on patients' veins, which can close up, leading to them needing surgery to correct the problem. Experts at Imperial College are developing a spiral shaped graft which they say will not have these problems. This allows blood to "swirl" through the graft, mimicking its natural action, and reducing the likelihood of problems developing. The graft has been tested in the laboratory, and the Imperial team is now beginning trials of the "Swirlgraft" in patients in conjunction with experts in other parts of Europe. [View Article](#)

Herbal Medicine Spawns Antimalarial Chemical

18 August – News@Nature.com reported that scientists believe they have come up with a fresh line of defense against the increasingly drug-resistant [malaria](#) parasite. Results suggest that the drug, which recently entered clinical trials in Britain, could revolutionize treatment of the disease.

Malaria claims around 1 million lives every year, and causes a further 300 million people to fall sick. In both Africa and Asia, the malaria parasite (*Plasmodium falciparum*) is becoming resistant to drugs such as chloroquine. Drugs based on the traditional Chinese remedy artemisinin have been developed but they can be expensive and the course of treatment lasts one week. The new medicine, called RBx-11160, is a synthetic, slightly altered version of artemisinin. It only needs to be taken for around three days, and its simple structure means it should be at least five times cheaper to produce. When infected mice are given the drug, 95-100% of parasites disappear within four days.

Conventional artemisinin drugs take a week to clear 95% of parasites. [View Article](#)

New Blood Screening Method for Mad Cow Variant

17 August – HealthDayNews reported that a method to screen blood donations for the proteins that cause the human form of [mad cow disease](#) has been developed by a Canadian biopharmaceutical company called Prometic. The process uses a chemical filter that binds to prions in bags of donated blood and highlights any residues. Prions are the infectious proteins that cause variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Prions, which attack the central nervous system and then invade the brain, can be transmitted through blood transfusions. This new screening method is costly. The chemical filters have to be inserted into the membrane of blood bags when they're manufactured, which would double the cost from about \$25 a bag to \$50 a bag. The company plans to market the technology in Europe next year. [View Article](#)

Patch Helps Teens Quit Smoking, Too

16 August – HealthDayNews reported that a new study concludes that teens who tried to quit [smoking](#) using nicotine patches had success rates similar to those of adults. "Kids who received treatment for smoking cessation achieved abstinence rates equivalent to adults," said study author Joel Killen, a professor of medicine at the Stanford Prevention Research Center at the Stanford University School of Medicine. "That's encouraging, because past literature addressing smoking cessation for teens has been dismal," Killen said. The American Cancer Society said that 5 million adolescents in the United States currently smoke. He said that for a long time it was assumed teens would have an easier time stopping smoking because they hadn't had the habit for as long. However, "Adolescents become addicted no differently than adults -- fairly quickly and fairly solidly in as little as several weeks," Glynn said. At the end of 10 weeks, 28 percent of those using the patch alone had quit smoking, while 23 percent of those on both the patch and bupropion had quit. Killen said this difference is statistically insignificant. After 26 weeks, however, 7 percent on the patch alone were still not smoking, while 8 percent on both medications were still abstinent. [View Article](#)

Protein Found to Regulate Sleep, Anxiety

18 August – HealthDayNews reported that a brain protein that regulates sleep and anxiety may offer a target for the development of new drugs to treat conditions such as [sleep](#) and [anxiety disorders](#) and [attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder](#). In research with rodents, University of California, Irvine scientists found that neuropeptide S (NPS) increases alertness, suppresses sleep and controls stress response. The results indicate that NPS is an important modulator of sleep and alertness. "Since our knowledge of NPS is so new, we may be at the tip of iceberg in understanding its function," lead researcher Rainer Reinscheid, an assistant adjunct professor in pharmacology, said. "We've found NPS to be so active with sleep and anxiety behavior that it can be a very attractive drug target, both to enhance and to suppress its function," Reinscheid said. [View Article](#)

Sick Veterans Pin Hopes on Gulf War Inquiry

18 August – News@Nature.com reported that dealing with an illness with no clearly defined symptoms is the challenge emerging from a UK inquiry into the illnesses facing veterans of the first Gulf War. Soldiers who fought in the conflict are falling sick in surprisingly high numbers. Yet experts say there is no definable '[Gulf War syndrome](#)' or any obvious reason for the symptoms. Several large-scale epidemiological studies have been run on veterans of the 1990–91 war and all have revealed significant increases in disease. A study of almost 10,000 UK veterans, for example, found that 24% suffered health problems, 14% higher than in a control group of some 5,000 who did not serve in the Gulf. A wide range of symptoms, from headaches and diarrhea to memory loss, were reported, ruling out post-traumatic stress disorder has made it impossible to distinguish a specific group of symptoms to characterize the condition. Identifying a cause for the high rates of ill-health has proved just as difficult. Experts have focused on two possibilities: exposure to nerve gas, and the medication given to soldiers before the war. [View Article](#)

Stroke Research Funding Lags in Europe

13 August - Forbes.com reported that [stroke](#) is the second leading cause of death worldwide, but funding for stroke research -- at least in Europe -- lags far behind funding for other causes of death that take fewer lives. The lack of funding is likely to be a worldwide phenomenon, said study author Dr. Peter Rothwell, a professor of clinical neurology at the University of Oxford. He and his team researched the issue after previous studies in the United States and the United Kingdom found stroke research was under-funded compared to coronary heart disease and cancer research. The team collected information on stroke, heart disease and cancer research funding. Stroke research funding made up a low percentage of the total funding for all three diseases taken together. And it often got one-tenth the research monies that cancer did. Funding for stroke research also lagged far behind heart research funding in eight of the nine countries, ranging between 2 percent in Austria and 58 percent in Switzerland. Only Turkey allocated more funding for stroke research. [View Article](#)

Study Indicates Why Hospitalists Improve Hospital Efficiency

13 August – EurekAlert reported that being treated by a "hospitalist" -- a physician who devotes all or most of his or her clinical time to the care of certain hospitalized patients -- improves efficiency of care by reducing hospital costs and length of stay, without compromising quality or patient satisfaction. Hospitalists, usually physicians in general internal medicine, serve as attending physicians for patients who are directed to inpatient care by their primary care provider or the emergency department. These patients are not sick enough to require treatment in an intensive care unit but have urgent, non-scheduled care needs for conditions such as pneumonia, liver disease, heart failure or diabetes complications. The team analyzed 1,706 patient admissions in 2000-2001 to four hospitals and clinics.

One service was staffed solely by hospitalists and the three other services by non-hospitalist physicians in internal medicine. The investigators found that patients cared for by the hospitalists had on average a one-day shorter length of stay (5.5 vs. 6.5 days) and a 10 percent reduction in hospital costs. Although the overall hospitalization costs for hospitalist-treated patients were less than for the other patients, the average cost per day was \$122 higher. As with non-hospitalist patients, the hospitalist patients were readmitted within 30 days only about 8 percent of the time. [View Article](#)

Study Supports Pairing Prozac, Therapy

18 August – NewsObserver.com reported that pairing Prozac with talk therapy works best to curb [depression](#) in children. Duke University scientists also found that a small number of children on the antidepressant showed an increased risk of harming themselves or others. However, the researchers did not draw a causal effect. At issue is whether the pills cause some children to suddenly flare with aggressiveness, self-injury and even become suicidal. The study examined 439 youngsters ages 12 to 17 who had been diagnosed with major depression. The children were randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups: 1) Prozac and cognitive behavioral therapy together, 2) Prozac alone, 3) talk therapy alone, or 4) sugar pill that looked like Prozac. The combination treatment of Prozac and talk therapy worked best to reduce depression. However, children who received Prozac -- whether with cognitive behavioral therapy or not -- had higher incidents of harmful behaviors. When the drugs were combined with cognitive behavioral therapy, however, the risk of harmful behaviors diminished, although they remained slightly elevated. [View Article](#)

Treadmill Stress Test May Not be Best at Finding Heart Disease

18 August – WISN.com reported that the most common test for [heart disease](#), the treadmill stress test to help identify hardening arteries in the heart might not always make the best diagnosis. Researchers say the treadmill test can sometimes overlook early stages of heart disease. In the study, over half the patients with normal treadmill results had calcium deposits in their arteries that were not detected. Researchers say a coronary calcium screening often works better than the treadmill test to see these small calcium deposits that can block blood flow. It uses a CT scan to take a 3D picture of the heart and shows doctors exactly how much calcium has built up inside the heart. The coronary calcium test is available around the country but is usually not paid for by most health insurance companies, so it's often not prescribed. [View Article](#)

West Nile Virus Dangerous for Immune Suppressed

16 August – Reuters reported that organ transplant recipients are at particular risk of developing serious complications from [West Nile virus](#) because they take pills to suppress their immune systems, making them more vulnerable to the mosquito-borne infection. Researchers monitored 11 transplant patients who contracted West Nile virus in the summer of 2003, and found 10 of them developed meningoencephalitis, an inflammation of the brain and a membrane surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Two died, and three others suffered long-term health problems. Organ recipients take drugs to suppress their immune system for the rest of their lives. The drugs leave them generally more vulnerable to infection and disease. [View Article](#)

Focus on Epidemiology

Assessment of the Effectiveness of the 2003--04 Influenza Vaccine

13 August – MMWR reported that the 2003--04 [influenza](#) season was characterized by the early onset of influenza activity, reports of severe illness, particularly in children, and predominant circulation of an influenza A (H3N2) virus strain that was antigenically different from the influenza A (H3N2) vaccine strain. In 2003, a retrospective cohort study among children and a case-control study among adults in Colorado were conducted to provide preliminary data on the effectiveness of the 2003--04 influenza vaccine. This report summarizes the results of those studies, which indicated vaccine effectiveness among both adults and children, differing from results of a previous study that did not indicate effectiveness among adults. The findings from the two studies indicated that the influenza vaccine had some effectiveness (25%--49% against nonlaboratory-confirmed influenza and 38%--52% against laboratory-confirmed influenza) in preventing illness during the 2003--04 influenza season, supporting recommendations to continue influenza vaccination efforts despite a suboptimal match between the predominant influenza A (H3N2) circulating and vaccine strains. [View Report](#)

DoD-GEIS: Avian Influenza A (H5N1)

WHO reports ongoing [avian influenza](#) (AI) activity in poultry in Vietnam with three deaths (two children, one adult) from AI and clusters of patients with severe pneumonia under investigation. Sustained person- to-person transmission of AI has not been documented during this outbreak. WHO, CDC and Institute of Medicine (IOM) have expressed concern that ongoing AI epizootics might cause opportunities for AI transmission events to humans and viral mutations that could lead to pandemic influenza. So far, DoD-GEIS is not aware of any immediate issues regarding special health concerns to DoD personnel and beneficiaries, but continued AI activity in South East Asia, including Vietnam and Thailand, and these cases of fatal illness after transmission to people in Vietnam, emphasize the need for continued vigilance and increased need for outbreak response preparations. In January, 2004, WHO activated the influenza pandemic preparedness plan in response to confirmed human cases of AI linked to outbreaks in poultry (Vietnam and Thailand). WHO describes the outbreaks as unprecedented in geographic scope, international spread and economic consequences. This AI strain has shown the capacity to infect humans and cause severe disease on three separate occasions from 1997 to the present; the 2004 outbreak in humans was the largest ever recorded. AI control efforts including culling of more than 100 million birds have reduced the risk to humans but the risk remains as long as this strain circulates in domestic poultry. WHO recommends continuing work to eliminate poultry H5N1, reporting of new outbreaks to relevant authorities and organizations, putting in place mechanisms to verify control progress, ensuring close collaboration (public health, agricultural and veterinary services), disease surveillance in humans and sharing viruses with laboratories in the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network. Informative web sites include [CDC](#), [IOM](#) and [WHO](#). Information on Influenza (avian and human) including the DoD Global Influenza Program, WNV, Leishmaniasis and severe respiratory syndromes, including SARS, is available from [DoD-GEIS](#).

Other timely information can be found in:

The current issue of the Army Medical Surveillance Activity's [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)

This week's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

USCENTCOM

Typhoid Outbreak Hits Western Tajikistan

12 August – The Miami Herald reported that 50 people have contracted [typhoid](#) in western Tajikistan and more than 70 others have been hospitalized with suspected cases of the infectious disease. The typhoid outbreak in Rudaki district, 12 miles south of the capital Dushanbe, was likely caused by the lack of clean drinking water, said the chief doctor at the district hospital. He said this was the largest typhoid outbreak to hit the area in the past six years. The impoverished former Soviet republic has been struggling with yearly typhoid outbreaks since the Soviet collapse in 1991. Last month, heavy rains damaged water supply systems across the country. [View Article](#) (registration required)

USEUCOM

Almost 100 Hit by Salmonella

14 August - BBC News reported that almost 100 people are now affected by an outbreak of [salmonella](#) in County Durham, health officials say. There are now 93 confirmed cases, with four more suspected and two people ill in hospital. A spokeswoman for Derwentside District Council's outbreak control team said all the cases involved people who ate contaminated food from a Stanley shop. The owners of Robson's Fresh Food are aiding the investigation. The shop has been closed since 29 July. Public health and environmental health officials are also involved in the investigation. Health officials have issued further reassurance to the public that effective control measures have been put in place. Salmonella infections cause a range of symptoms including diarrhea, abdominal pain, headache, nausea, vomiting and fever. [View Article](#)

Nigeria: Fresh Polio Outbreak Recorded

13 August - AllAfrica.com reported that three local government areas in Benue State have reported fresh cases of [polio](#). The local governments of Obi, Apa and Agatu, already devastated by the disease, are currently under investigation by health authorities to ascertain the level of the outbreak. At least eight cases were reported in Obi last year while one case has been officially reported this year. In Apa, at least two per cent of the children between the ages of 1 to 14 years have been affected by the disease. Mr. Dennis Oshimagye, Benue State Coordinator of National Programme on Immunisation, said "in every one case of the disease reported, there are 200 cases not known." [View Article](#)

Outbreak of Hepatitis A in Flemish Belgium, July-August 2004

15 August – ProMED reported that in July 2004, the health inspectorate of the Flemish community observed a sharp increase in reports of cases of [hepatitis A](#). Between 7 July and 10 August, 80 cases were reported in the Grimbergen area (Vlaams-Brabant province), and, 172 cases in Antwerp province. In comparison, 12 cases were reported in Vlaams-Brabant and 32 in Antwerp, in the period from January to June 2004. Cases were clustered in space and time, notably in specific towns. Most patients were young adults. It is currently suspected that the sources are food handlers with hepatitis A, possibly working in a meat processing plant that supplies meat to butcher's shops in the Antwerp and Grimbergen area. [View Article](#)

Russia: Three Cases of Anthrax in Kutaisi

12 August – ProMED reported that three people were hospitalized with [anthrax](#) in Kutaisi. According to the Georgian National Center for Disease Control, one of the patients was infected by eating infected meat from the central market in Kutaisi. The two other men were infected while slaughtering a cow. Stricter controls on the selling of meat are in place in Kutaisi. It is recommended that meat be purchased only in places under strict veterinary control. [View Article](#)

South Africa: Bird Flu Found On Three More Farms

19 August – The Mail and Guardian reported that [avian flu](#) has been detected on three more farms near Middleton in the Eastern Cape, but the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs said there is no need to panic as the farms are within its quarantine zone. Spokesperson Segoati Mahlangu said five ostrich farms had a total population of 10,500 birds and that 8,670 have already been culled, under the supervision of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. According to Mahlangu there is no evidence that the H5N2 strain of the virus discovered in Middleton could be harmful to humans. "At this stage there is no indication that this strain can affect people like the H5N1 strain in the Far East," he said. Despite the self-imposed ban on the export of ostrich meat, Mahlangu said many other ostrich products are exempted from the ban. These include empty ostrich eggs that have been disinfected, feathers that have been fumigated, tanned leather and meat that has been treated and processed at a temperature of at least 70 degrees Celsius. [View Article](#)

South Africa Tops Nations with HIV/AIDS

18 August – Keralanext.com reported that [AIDS](#) has killed 1.7 million people in South Africa, including two children of the country's Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi. The country, with a total population of some 45 million, tops the list of nations hardest hit by HIV/AIDS around the world, a report by Statistics South Africa said. Buthelezi has been praised for his bravery to tell the public the cause of his children's death after his 53-year-old son died in April and 48-year-old daughter died this month of AIDS-related illnesses. He warned South Africans that HIV/AIDS affects all, despite lifestyle. He told Parliament that the disease has destroyed his family, "in spite of the lifestyle stringently maintained by my wife and me and the social status we enjoy." Buthelezi blamed the government for failing to make HIV/AIDS a national emergency. Meanwhile, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) estimated the extent of HIV/AIDS among its soldiers at 23 percent, an official said. The estimate was based on tests conducted on personnel being assessed for deployment on foreign peacekeeping missions. The proportion was even higher than South Africa's average HIV prevalence rate, estimated to be 15.2 percent in 2004 by Statistics South Africa. [View Article](#)

USNORTHCOM

400,000 Hits on New State Web Site

18 August - WSTM.com reported that a new state Web site that allows consumers to comparison shop for prescription drugs is proving a big hit. State officials at the attorney general's office say the site drew more than 400,000 hits in its first 24 hours. State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer launched the site -- <http://www.nyagr.org/>. A help line is also provided for those without computers -- 800-771-7755, press option number three. The new Web site allows consumers to shop online for a

prescription, giving comparisons by store, address and price throughout the state. Spitzer says the online information covers 170 pharmacies including major chains in 25 counties. [View Article](#)

Arizona Leads Nation in West Nile Cases

17 August – HealthDayNews reported that thousands of abandoned swimming pools, along with irrigation canals and other prime breeding sites for mosquitoes in Phoenix have made Arizona the state hardest hit by [West Nile virus](#) this year. Arizona has accounted for at least 290 of more than 500 reported cases of West Nile virus in the United States so far in 2004. Nearly all those cases in Arizona have been in Maricopa county, which includes Phoenix. It's estimated that at least 30,000 Arizona residents may have the virus and are unaware that they're infected because they have only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. The virus appeared west of the Continental Divide for the first time in 2003, when Colorado was hit hard. The virus has now moved through Arizona and into California. [View Article](#)

Doctors Create Guidelines for Painkillers

15 August – The Indianapolis Star reported that leading U.S. pain experts have collaborated with the Drug Enforcement Administration on a set of frequently asked questions and answers designed to improve [pain treatment](#) while attacking the growing problem of [prescription-drug abuse](#). The authors hope it will alleviate doctors' concerns that they'll jeopardize their career if they prescribe narcotic painkillers, or opiates. About 30 percent of the U.S. population has chronic pain, and a third of them are disabled by it, says Russell Portenoy of New York's Beth Israel Medical Center. He says opioids "appear to be very much underused and stigmatized." Patricia Good of the Drug Enforcement Administration's diversion control office says there are many misconceptions about her agency's role, leading to "unwarranted fear" that doctors will be targeted if they prescribe opiates. Last year, she says, the DEA arrested only 50 doctors for improperly prescribing narcotics or other controlled substances for abuse. [View Article](#)

Drugs to Fight Effects of Dirty Bombs Approved

12 August – Boston.com reported that the Food and Drug Administration approved two new products designed to help deal with the consequences of terrorists using dirty bombs. Acting FDA Commissioner Lester M. Crawford said the products, to be available by prescription only, are designed to speed elimination of [radiation](#) from the body. Dirty bombs have become an increasing concern. They rely on conventional explosives to blow radioactive material far and wide. The agency said the goal is to provide protection from both nuclear accidents and threats. It said the two drugs are safe and effective for treating contamination from the elements plutonium, americium, or curium. These three radioactive elements can enter the body through ingestion, inhalation, or wounds. Approved were pentetate calcium trisodium injection, Ca-DTPA, and pentetate zinc trisodium injection, Zn-DTPA. [View Article](#) [View FDA News Release](#)

FDA Approves Device to Treat Stroke

16 August – HealthDayNews reported that the first medical device designed to remove blood clots from the brains of people suffering ischemic [stroke](#) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The Merci Retriever is inserted through a surgical opening in the groin and threaded through an artery leading to the brain. When it reaches the target area, the device captures and removes the blood clot. An ischemic stroke occurs when a blood clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain, which can lead to severe disability or death. The FDA approval of the Merci Retriever was

granted after the device was tested in a clinical study of 141 ischemic stroke patients at 25 medical centers in the United States. [View Article](#)

No Anthrax in Envelope Sent to Pontiac Mayor

13 August – The Detroit Free Press reported that the city of Pontiac officials said the powdery substance delivered in an envelope to the mayor's office Wednesday afternoon was not [anthrax](#). The substance, tested in Lansing, was definitely not anthrax but has not been positively identified. [View Article](#)

Raccoon Rabies Spreads to Cape Cod, Rhode Island

14 August – ProMED reported that the Massachusetts state budget cuts that reduced funding for oral anti-[rabies](#) vaccination of raccoons from \$209,000 in 2001 to just \$60,000 in 2004 left the Cape Cod Rabies Task Force nearly penniless at the end of June 2004. Rabies first hit raccoons in Massachusetts in 1992, but a decade of successful vaccination kept the disease from jumping the Cape Cod Canal until March 2004. 22 rabid raccoons were found in 4 Cape Cod towns by 13 June. The rabies outbreak also hit Rhode Island. A raccoon that was found acting strangely at a golf course turned out to be rabid and was killed. [View Article](#)

University of Maryland Rushing To Shake Norovirus

13 August – The Washington Post reported that maintenance workers had scrubbed down the dormitory rooms, hallways and stair railings with strong bleach at LaPlata Hall at the University of Maryland. A sign taped to the front doors said the building was closed and gave no indication of when it would reopen. The dorm had housed a summer conference of about 300 high school students, but they were forced to move out this week after an outbreak of the highly contagious [norovirus](#) sent about one-third of them to hospitals. All of the ill students, who complained of severe nausea, diarrhea and stomach cramps, were given the green light to go home yesterday by Prince George's County health officials. University officials also closed the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center after someone involved with a music camp experienced symptoms similar to those caused by the norovirus. [View Article](#) (registration required)

U.S. Posts Fewest Measles Cases in Nearly a Century

14 August – HealthDay News reported that just 44 cases of [measles](#) were tallied in the United States in 2002, the lowest number in the 92 years since records have been kept, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. Only 216 cases of the virus were recorded in the three years from 2001-2003, compared with more than 55,000 cases between 1989 and 1991. Thanks to preventive vaccinations and other public health efforts, the CDC declared the U.S. measles-free in 2000, meaning that virtually every case reported since then has been traced to people visiting the U.S. from places like Europe and Asia. For that reason, measles shots among Americans are still a must, the CDC warned. Among people who aren't immunized, the virus can cause pneumonia, diarrhea, encephalitis, and death, the wire service said. [View Article](#)

VA Care Beats Managed Care for Diabetes

16 August – Reuters reported that veterans with [diabetes](#) get better care under the Department of Veterans Affairs system than some patients using managed care. The study shows VA patients got the recommended care more often. The study suggests that nationalized health care can work, the researchers said. Her team studied 1,285 patients with diabetes treated at five VA medical centers

and 6,920 patients in eight commercial managed care health plans. They looked at whether patients received seven standard recommended tests or services. They found that 93 percent of VA patients had an annual hemoglobin A1c test, compared to 83 percent of managed care patients, and 75 percent of VA patients were told about how aspirin can prevent heart attack and stroke, compared to 49 percent of managed care patients. They found that 91 percent of VA patients had an annual eye exam compared to 75 percent of managed care patients. Diabetes can lead to blindness. [View Article](#)

USPACOM

Anthrax Scare at U.S. Embassy in Malaysia

16 August – HealthDay News reported that a suspicious powder mailed to the United States Embassy in Malaysia sparked an [anthrax](#) scare. The powder is being tested to determine if it contains anthrax spores or any other dangerous substances. It was mailed to the embassy in a leaflet from an unknown group demanding that the U.S. remove its troops from Iraq. Three embassy staff members were exposed to a yellowish substance when they opened the envelope. They were briefly detained for a medical checkup, which determined that they were well. [View Article](#)

Bird Flu Outbreak in Malaysia

19 August – News.com.au reported that the H5 strain of [avian influenza](#) had been found on a farm in the north eastern state of Kelantan neighboring Thailand. Hawari Hussein, director-general of the veterinary services, said that the H5 bird flu had been detected in a village near Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Further testing was being done at University Putra Malaysia to determine whether the virus was N1 or N2 type, he said. "If it is just H5 virus, it is not dangerous to humans, but if it is of N1 or N2, it can cause death," he said. [View Article](#)

Three Deaths in Vietnam Blamed on Avian Flu

12 August - CIDRAP News reported that three people in Vietnam died recently of the H5N1 strain of [avian influenza](#). The three are the first human victims of avian flu since March. The latest victims, two of whom were small children, all tested positive for the H5N1 virus, according to Trinh Quan Huan, head of the Vietnamese Ministry of Health's Department for Preventative Medicine and HIV/AIDS. Trinh said a 4-year-old and a 1-year-old died in Ha Tay province about 30 miles west of Hanoi, while the other victim died in Hau Giang province in the Mekong Delta, about 110 miles south of Ho Chi Minh City. [View Article](#)

US Embassy in Sri Lanka to Reopen

13 August – BBC News reported that the American embassy in Sri Lanka will reopen after a security scare turned out to be unfounded. Tests carried out on a white powder received in embassy mail showed no sign of [anthrax](#). The embassy will reopen nearly a week after it was shut down. Staff were ordered to leave from the mission located in a high security area of the capital, Colombo. The American Centre, which is in a separate compound nearby and houses a library and the offices of USAID, was also closed. The move came after the embassy received a letter with a suspicious white powder in it. [View Article](#)

Vietnam: Bird Flu Victim Tests Positive

14 August – The New Zealand Herald reported that one of three people who died of suspected [bird flu](#) has tested positive for the H5N1 strain of the avian flu virus, heightening fears about the return of a disease that killed 24 people in Asia earlier this year. Vietnam's health ministry said eight more people suspected of being infected with bird flu were in hospital. The positive test was from a 25-year-old woman who lived in southern Hau Giang province and had come into contact with poultry. The other two fatal cases from the northern Ha Tay province were still being tested. Typical symptoms are coughing, high fever and sore throat. Death usually occurs within days. [View Article](#)

Viet Nam: Family Members Test Negative for Avian Influenza Virus

15 August – ProMED reported that family members and contacts of 2 of the 3 people to have died from [bird flu](#) in Viet Nam have tested negative for the disease. Nguyen Thanh Liem, Director of the Pediatric Hospital in Hanoi, said relatives of 2 children who died in northern Ha Tay province, a boy aged 4, and a baby girl less than one year old, were all safe. "We tested 40 samples of relatives and neighbors of the 2 children... and they are all negative," he said. [View Article](#)

USSOUTHCOM

Cholera – Colombia (Narino)

12 August – ProMED reported that 2 confirmed cases and 1 possible case of [cholera](#) were sufficient for the National Institute of Drug and Food Surveillance (Invima) to declare a sanitary emergency in the country and particularly in Tumaco, the main port of Narino province in the Pacific. Invima suspects the existence of another 3 possible cases in the town of Barbacoas, also in Narino, and ordered all health departments in the country to adopt the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the disease. So far, all cases are under control. Invima alerted the community to ensure that water for human consumption is drinkable, to avoid raw and non-pasteurized milk and to prevent eggs, meat, seafood, and chicken to contact other foods, as they are more likely to contain bacteria. [View Article](#)

Please contact us to comment on or suggest improvements to this report. This report is also available on the [USACHPPM website](#).

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