

USACHPPM

HEALTH INFORMATION OPERATIONS (HIO) UPDATE

6 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 regarding potential strategic or tactical impact to the US Army and as such, should not be regarded as a medical intelligence product. Medical intelligence products are available at <http://mic.afmic.detrick.army.mil/>. The information in the HIO Update should provide an increased awareness of current and emerging health-related issues.

HOT TOPICS.....	2
A Step Closer to Clinical Predictors of Inhalational Anthrax	2
After First Year Flop, FluMist Maker Retools Strategy.....	2
Bottled Water Blamed For Tooth Decay	2
Condom Use Decreases Pelvic Inflammatory Disease Recurrence.....	3
Defibrillators Could Soon Be On Drugstore Shelves	3
More Evidence Links Flu to Schizophrenia.....	3
Scientists Make Mad Cow Prion in Lab	3
Statement by the American Lung Association Regarding Flu Shots and Asthma	4
Synthetic Hormone May Prompt Tan, Protect From Sun.....	4
Toy to Help Afghan Women Learn About Health.....	4
Unreliable Websites Put Patients at Risk.....	5
FOCUS ON EPIDEMIOLOGY	5
West Nile Virus Activity --- United States.....	5
DoD-GEIS: <i>Salmonella javiana</i> Outbreak Linked to Sheetz Gas Stations in PA.....	6
USCENTCOM	7
Tajikistan: Water Quality in Capital Remains a Source of Concern.....	7
USEUCOM	7
Bird Flu: Emergency Measures in South Africa	7
Chad: Cholera Outbreak Kills 38 near Ndjamena.....	8
Criminal Probe Launched Over Novosibirsk Meningitis Outbreak	8
DRC: Suspected Plague Kills 58 in Ituri.....	8
Mumps Outbreak in England and Wales Worst in a Decade.....	8
Polio Vaccinations Resume in Nigeria	9
Russia: Poisoning toll in Tula region rises to 63	9
UN Agencies Fight Meningitis Epidemic in Northern Burundi.....	9
USNORTHCOM	9
100 Deaths from Superbug in 18 Months in One Quebec Hospital	9
Four Infants Die in Hospital Germ Outbreak.....	9
Job-Based Health Insurance Slips.....	10
Johns Hopkins Launches Study of Free Home Test Kit for STD's	10
Location Could Be Behind Gap in Health Care for Blacks.....	10
New Anti-AIDS Combinations Approved.....	10
New York: Jamestown Canyon Virus Identified In Clinton County	11
Personality, Alcohol Abuse Disorders Common in U.S.	11
USPACOM	11
Asian Nations to Collaborate on Avian Flu	11

Bangladesh: Diarrhea Outbreak Takes Alarming Turn In Flood Zones	12
Bangladesh: UNICEF Alarmed By Respiratory Diseases in Flood Zones	12
China to Send Voluntary Medical Team to Tibet	12
Dengue Fever Outbreak Reported In Palau	12
Health Officials Warn Of Meningitis Outbreak	13
Life at Academy Settles After Outbreak.....	13
U.N. Officials Move on Bird Flu Vaccines	13
USSOUTHCOM.....	13
Paraguay: UN Agencies Muster Aid for Survivors of Disastrous Fire	13

HOT TOPICS

A Step Closer to Clinical Predictors of Inhalational Anthrax

30 July - CIDRAP News reported that researchers may offer physicians further help in quickly and accurately distinguishing early inhalational [anthrax](#) from other respiratory conditions—a vitally important skill if a widespread anthrax emergency were to occur. The scientists found that the definitive predictor of inhalational anthrax was the chest radiograph. The presence of mediastinal widening or pleural effusion was 100% sensitive for inhalational anthrax, 71.8% specific for inhalational anthrax when compared with community-acquired pneumonia (CAP), and 95.6% specific for inhalational anthrax compared with influenza-like illness (ILI). Additional clinical characteristics found in the study to be more common in inhalational anthrax patients than in those with CAP or ILI included nausea, vomiting, pallor or cyanosis, diaphoresis, altered mental status, and elevated hematocrit levels. [View Article](#)

After First Year Flop, FluMist Maker Retools Strategy

1 August – Mlive.com reported that last fall, MedImmune Inc. launched a \$25 million campaign to convince consumers that its [influenza vaccine](#), delivered through a squirt in the nose, was better than the traditional needle in the arm. However, only a fraction of the 4 million doses made were sold and thousands ended up being distributed for free despite a harsh flu year. MedImmune has refocused its marketing plan for the nasal vaccine pitching the drug to doctors and pharmacies, not the general public. The company cut the price in half and plans to produce about 1 million doses this year. By keeping FluMist on the market, even at a substantial loss, MedImmune says the vaccine, made of a weakened live flu virus, provides better protection than flu shots made with a dead virus. MedImmune is laying the groundwork for a reformulated version of the drug, expected to be ready by 2007. The new version, known as CAIV-T, will be easier for doctors to store because it won't need to be frozen. [View Article](#)

Bottled Water Blamed For Tooth Decay

5 August – The Age reported that the growing popularity of bottled water is sending Australian [children's dental health](#) backwards. In a study of 10,000 children under 15 years of age, researchers found those who drank only non-fluoridated tank or bottled water had 52 per cent more cavities in their baby teeth than those who drank only fluoridated tap-water. Manufacturers of bottled water should consider marketing fluoridated versions, said researcher Jason Armfield of the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health in Adelaide. [View Article](#)

Condom Use Decreases Pelvic Inflammatory Disease Recurrence

28 July - EurekAlert reported that to decrease their risk for a common and serious infection of the upper genital tract called [pelvic inflammatory disease](#) (PID) women should make sure their sexual partners use condoms and use them consistently. Consistent condom users were half as likely to have an episode of recurrent PID as those women whose partners never used condoms. Significantly, women who reported regular use of condoms were 60 percent less likely to become infertile. "Bacteria that cause cervical infection can travel into the upper genital tract and trigger PID," said Dr. Roberta Ness, M.D., M.P.H., professor and chair of the department of epidemiology at GSPH and the study's first author. In the United States, more than a million women will have an episode of acute PID each year, with the rate highest among teenagers. [View Article](#)

Defibrillators Could Soon Be On Drugstore Shelves

3 August – Miami Herald.com reported that heart-shocking devices -- known as automated external defibrillators and commonly used in airports and health clubs -- may soon be sold in drugstores. A Food and Drug Administration panel recommended to the agency that such a device be sold without a prescription, which is now required. Philips Medical Systems of Seattle had to prove to the 11 experts that anyone with minimal training could safely use its HeartStart home-use device to revive a sudden cardiac arrest victim. "The benefits of having the device available over the counter strongly outweigh the small perceived or potential risks," said FDA advisor William Maisel, a cardiologist at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston. The experts were concerned that home users might not call 911. They asked Philips to enlarge such instructions on the HeartStart case. [View Article](#) (registration required)

More Evidence Links Flu to Schizophrenia

2 August – Yahoo! News reported more evidence suggesting that the children of some women who get the [flu](#) while pregnant are at higher risk of developing [schizophrenia](#). In the study, researchers looked at blood samples taken decades earlier from pregnant women participating in a separate study. Compared with women who hadn't been infected, women with flu antibodies during the first half of pregnancy had a threefold risk of having children who developed schizophrenia. An even bigger, sevenfold risk occurred during the first trimester, a critical period for fetal development. The researchers emphasized that the overall risks are still quite small. Only about 1 percent of the U.S. population has schizophrenia and the results suggest that about 97 percent of babies born to women who had the flu while pregnant will not develop schizophrenia. The findings suggest one more reason for pregnant women to get a flu shot. [View Article](#)

Scientists Make Mad Cow Prion in Lab

2 August – Reuters reported that researchers have made a prion in the laboratory and used it to demonstrate that the misfolded proteins are indeed the sole cause of [mad cow disease](#). The research may open the way to treatments for the currently untreatable and incurable family of prion diseases, which include not only mad cow but the human Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and a related human form of CJD caused by eating mad cow-infected beef. "Our study demonstrates that misfolding a particular segment of the normal prion protein is sufficient to transform the protein into infectious prions," said lead researcher Giuseppe Legname at the University of California San Francisco. The researchers created a synthetic prion by using bacteria to grow prion fragments and then folding them into larger protein structures. They injected these into the brains of mice bred to be susceptible to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy -- mad cow disease -- CJD and others. The mice started showing symptoms in about a year. [View Article](#)

Statement by the American Lung Association Regarding Flu Shots and Asthma

31 July - Medical News Today.com reported that the American Lung Association (ALA) is concerned about a story reported in Reuters Health, "Flu Shot Doesn't Prevent Kids' Asthma Flare-Ups". The ALA determined that the [flu shot](#) is safe for people with [asthma](#). The American Lung Association believes it would be more detrimental if people with asthma avoided being vaccinated for the flu. The Rochester study was a retrospective non-randomized study and did not control for severity of asthma. The ALA's "Study of Inactive Influenza Vaccines in Asthmatics" (SIIVA) trial showed that asthma exacerbation occurred after a placebo injection as frequently as with the flu vaccine. In other words, flu shots didn't cause exacerbations. This study answered the question unequivocally that the flu shot is safe for people with asthma. In addition, an analysis done by the American Lung Association estimated that, in fact, vaccinating every child with asthma against the flu could prevent nearly 100,000 hospitalizations in a year. [View Article](#)

Symptoms of Foodborne Botulism May Help Predict Fatality

4 August – EurekAlert reported that the extreme toxicity of [botulism](#) makes it a potentially lethal type of food poisoning – and a possible agent of bioterrorist attack. Data from the Republic of Georgia suggest that an infected person's symptoms could help doctors predict how immediate the risk of death is, allowing physicians to prioritize victim care based on severity of symptoms. Botulism is caused by eating food contaminated with a naturally occurring bacterium and can cause double vision, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, dilated pupils, drooping eyelids and slurred speech, followed by eventual paralysis. Researchers discovered that the patients at highest risk of dying were those who reported to the hospital with shortness of breath and impaired gag reflex but lack of diarrhea. This constellation of symptoms would allow doctors to give first consideration to patients who are at highest risk of dying in a botulism outbreak. Other CDC researchers suggest that sufficient supplies of antitoxin and other medical supplies should be available and "a coordinated medical system and response plan" should be in place to respond to a botulism outbreak. [View Article](#)

Synthetic Hormone May Prompt Tan, Protect From Sun

1 August – The Houston Chronicle.com reported that someday, there may be a way for fair-skinned people to protect against [sunburn](#) and get a healthy, skin-protecting tan at the same time. Researchers say they have found a way to use a synthetic hormone to reduce skin damage in people with sensitive skin. The study found that the synthetic hormone could be combined safely with short exposures to sunlight or UV-B light to get a darker tan — and more melanin in the skin. The study used Melanotan-1, a synthetic version of a pigmentation hormone found in animals and in pregnant women. The hormone can darken skin and produce melanin without sunlight. The 11 people who participated in the study received daily injections of the hormone for two weeks. The next step will be to develop a time-release injection that could be given every few months at a dermatologist's office. [View Article](#)

Toy to Help Afghan Women Learn About Health

3 August – Reuters reported that a popular child's toy meant to teach reading skills will be distributed to illiterate Afghan women to help them learn about health. The Health and Human Services Department teamed up with LeapFrog Enterprises to distribute 2,000 specially designed, interactive books in a pilot project. Eventually, HHS plans to distribute 20,000 books. The books, which play recorded information when touched with a pen, will provide information on diet, childhood immunization, pregnancy, breast-feeding, sanitation and clean water, treating injuries and burns, and preventing disease. The United Nations estimates infant mortality in Afghanistan at 165 deaths per 1,000 live births. "Maternal mortality rates in Afghanistan are also among the highest in the world, with

1,600 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (as compared to the United States rate of 7.5 deaths per 100,000)," HHS added. LeapFrog said the material for the books was developed by a team of HHS health care professionals and experts from the ministries of Women's Affairs and Health in Afghanistan. [View Article](#)

Unreliable Websites Put Patients at Risk

2 August – News@Nature.com reported that one in ten websites offering information on alternative cancer therapies give advice that could harm patients. Patients with life-threatening diseases, such as cancer, often use the web to seek out alternative therapies, but the quality of the information varies greatly. Researchers surveyed the 32 most popular sites offering advice on 'alternative' or 'complementary' medicine and cancer. In total, the sites touted 118 cancer 'cures', such as shark cartilage and mistletoe, and 59 cancer 'preventions', including green tea and flaxseed, also known as linseed. None of these treatments have been scientifically proven to work. Worse still, three of the websites overtly discouraged patients from using conventional cancer care, such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy. One of the sites also dissuaded its readers from taking doctors' advice. Good websites do exist, and the majority of those tested provided useful and reliable information. The researchers suggest that the major cancer organizations should investigate websites offering cancer-related information and issue a recognized 'seal of approval' to help patients sift good advice from bad. [View Article](#)

Focus on Epidemiology

West Nile Virus Activity --- United States

30 July – MMWR reported that during July 21--27, a total of 83 cases of human [West Nile virus](#) (WNV) illness were reported from 13 states (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota). During 2004, a total of 265 cases of human West Nile virus illness have been reported through ArboNET from a total of 18 states (Table, Figure). Of these, 161 (61%) cases were reported from Arizona. A total of 143 (56%) of the 265 cases occurred in males; the median age of patients was 50 years (range: 1--85 years). Illness onset ranged from April 23 to July 23; six cases were fatal. A total of 28 presumptive West Nile viremic blood donors (PVDs) have been reported in 2004 to ArboNET. Of these, 26 (93%) were reported from Arizona, and one each from Iowa and New Mexico. Of the 28 PVDs, two persons aged 66 and 69 years subsequently had neuroinvasive illness, and five persons (median age: 52 years [range: 22--63 years]) subsequently had West Nile fever.

In addition, during 2004, a total of 1,513 dead corvids and 162 other dead birds with WNV infection have been reported from 32 states. WNV infections in horses have been reported from 16 states (Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming) and in a dog from New Mexico. WNV seroconversions have been reported in 209 sentinel chicken flocks from four states (Arizona, California, Florida, and Louisiana) and in a wild hatchling bird from Ohio. Three seropositive sentinel horses were reported from Puerto Rico. A total of 1,030 WNV-positive mosquito pools have been reported from 18 states (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia).

Additional information about national WNV activity is available from [CDC](#) and the [US Geological Survey](#). [View Article](#)

TABLE. Number of human cases of West Nile virus (WNV) illness, by state — United States, 2004*

State	Neuroinvasive disease [†]	West Nile fever [‡]	Other clinical/unspecified [¶]	Total reported to CDC ^{**}	Deaths
Alabama	0	0	1	1	0
Arizona	92	24	45	161	2
Arkansas	1	2	0	3	0
California	18	19	5	42	1
Colorado	5	25	0	30	0
Florida	4	2	0	6	0
Illinois	0	0	1	1	0
Iowa	1	2	0	3	1
Michigan	1	0	0	1	0
Missouri	1	0	0	1	0
Nebraska	0	1	0	1	0
New Mexico	1	4	0	5	0
New York	1	0	0	1	0
Ohio	1	0	0	1	1
Pennsylvania	1	0	0	1	0
South Dakota	1	3	0	4	0
Texas	2	0	0	2	1
Wyoming	0	1	0	1	0
Total	130	83	52	265	6

* As of July 27, 2004.

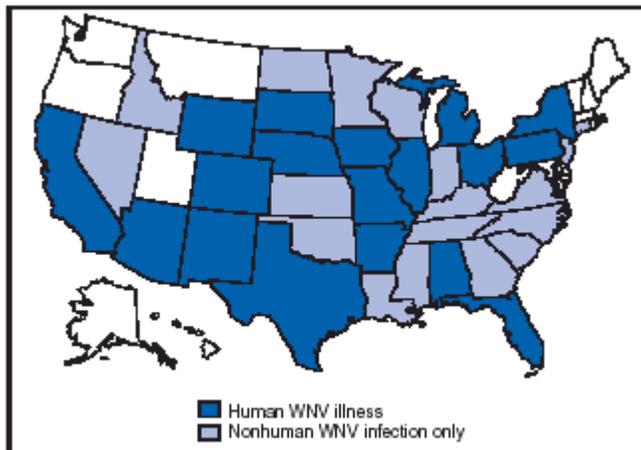
[†] Cases with neurologic manifestations (i.e., West Nile meningitis, West Nile encephalitis, and West Nile myelitis).

[‡] Cases with no evidence of neuroinvasion.

[¶] Illnesses for which sufficient clinical information was not provided.

^{**} Total number of human cases of WNV illness reported to ArboNet by state and local health departments.

FIGURE. Areas reporting West Nile virus (WNV) activity — United States, 2004*



* As of 3 a.m., Mountain Standard Time, July 27, 2004.

DoD-GEIS: *Salmonella javiana* Outbreak Linked to Sheetz Gas Stations in PA

The **Pennsylvania** State Department of Health reported that as of 4 August, 330 Pennsylvanians have been sickened from [Salmonella javiana](#). Current Case Incidence updates are available at the [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) website.

Current evidence suggests consumption of sliced Roma tomatoes as components of deli items are associated with illness in patients. Pittsburgh DOH officials suspect that additional illnesses may occur. Health officials in **West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, and Ohio** are reporting another 73 cases thought to be linked to this outbreak. [View Press Release](#)

Further tests will determine how many of the cases now being reported now can be linked definitively to the outbreak. This *Salmonella* outbreak could become one of the largest in the nation during the past decade.

Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) can receive *Salmonella* isolates for species subtyping for military beneficiaries suspected as having illnesses linked to this outbreak. Salmonellosis is a Reportable Medical Event in the military, and these cases should be reported through appropriate medical reporting systems. AFIP **Laboratory Point of Contact**: Maj. Richard Schoske; schoske@afip.osd.mil (202) 782-1753 Fax: (202) 782-7477

Other timely information can be found in:

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

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

USCENTCOM

Tajikistan: Water Quality in Capital Remains a Source of Concern

3 August – IRIN News.org reported that some residents of the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, remain reluctant to use tap water, complaining that it is over chlorinated. Such a comment follows a recent decision by the authorities to stop the delivery of clean drinking water by truck. The city authorities said that the water supply system in the capital was now up and running again and water could be consumed after boiling. Most of the city's water chlorination equipment is old and in disrepair, dating back to the Soviet Union. Alimakhmad Sufiev, director of the centre on hygiene control of the city's water supply, admitted that the dose of chlorine in running water exceeded the norm, but noted it was a safety measure to avoid an outburst of [typhoid](#). [View Source](#)

USEUCOM

Bird Flu: Emergency Measures in South Africa

5 August – News24.com reported that preliminary tests show that the [avian flu](#), which broke out in the Eastern Cape, is caused by the life-threatening virus that claimed the lives of more than 20 people in Asia earlier this year. Ostrich farmers have already suffered millions of rands in losses. Although the diagnosis will only be confirmed at the end of this week, emergency measures have been put into place to prevent the disease from spreading to the Western Cape, as this could lead to the European Union placing a ban on South African ostrich products. The first roadblocks on all access roads between the Eastern and Western Cape are operational. The directorate of veterinary services has

already placed a ban on the transport of ostriches, ostrich meat, raw skins, feathers and eggs from the Eastern to the Western Cape. The Western Cape is responsible for 75% of all South Africa's ostrich production and the Eastern Cape for 25%. [View Article](#)

Chad: Cholera Outbreak Kills 38 near N'djamena

30 July – AllAfrica.com reported that a [cholera](#) outbreak in and around N'djamena, the capital of Chad, has infected more than 600 people over the past month and 38 have died. Josette Benamane, the newly appointed MSF Belgium Coordinator in N'djamena, said the first cases of cholera were registered in early July in villages near Lake Chad, to the north of the capital, but the number of new cases mushroomed last week following heavy rains. Cholera epidemics are normally caused by poor sanitation and polluted drinking water. They are perennial hazards during the rainy season in much of West Africa as latrines overflow and wells become polluted. [View Article](#)

Criminal Probe Launched Over Novosibirsk Meningitis Outbreak

3 August – Itar-Tass reported that prosecutors in the Novosibirsk region instituted criminal proceedings in connection with an outbreak of [aseptic meningitis](#), which sickened 177 people, including 144 children. The total number of cases in the region has reached 258 since the beginning of this year. Authorities had to close three children summer recreation centers, and issue a warning not to bathe in the proximity of Novosibirsk. Specialists found out that violation of hygienic rules and an emergency discharge of large volumes of fecal waters into the Obskoye reservoir in winter and spring this year caused a mass incidence of meningitis. Enteroviruses, agents of the dangerous infection were found in sewage. Aseptic meningitis is dangerous because if the disease is not treated on time its virus affects the central nervous system and a person is paralyzed. Apart from Novosibirsk, the outbreaks of aseptic meningitis have been registered in the Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk regions of the Urals, in the Irkutsk region, and in the Khabarovsk territory. [View Article](#)

DRC: Suspected Plague Kills 58 in Ituri

29 July – IRIN News reported that 58 people, suspected to have caught the [plague](#), had died so far this year in the northeastern district of Ituri, Democratic Republic of the Congo. They were among the 1,042 suspected plague cases recorded since January. The mission's report shows that 90 percent of the cases are suspected to be bubonic plague, 7 percent pulmonary plague, while 3 percent are suspected to be a variant that affects the blood. Dr. Tarcis Elongo of WHO Bunia said that one of the factors encouraging the epidemic was the climate. "The high humidity during the rainy season forces [people] to store their food indoors, and this attracts rats and fleas that are carriers of the disease," he said. "The fact that people are forced to live in the bush during fighting has also contributed to its spread." [View Article](#)

Mumps Outbreak in England and Wales Worst in a Decade

3 August – Medical News Today reported that England and Wales are experiencing the most serious outbreak of [mumps](#) in nearly a decade largely because young adults missed out on the MMR (mumps, measles and rubella) program which began in 1988. Confirmed cases of mumps more than trebled last year, from 497 in 2002 to 1529 cases in 2003. The trend is continuing to rise, with 578 cases reported in England and Wales during the first quarter of 2004. Dr Mary Ramsay of the HPA's Immunizations Department says the mumps outbreak affects mainly young people born before 1990. They were offered the single measles vaccine and later had the combined measles and rubella vaccine as part of the 1994 school vaccination campaign. The combined MMR jab was not introduced until 1996. 'Only a few will have received MMR vaccine and therefore any protection at all against

mumps,' Dr Ramsay points out. [View Article](#)

Polio Vaccinations Resume in Nigeria

1 August - The New York Times.com reported that Kano, a mainly Muslim state in northern Nigeria, resumed [polio](#) immunizations on Saturday after a 10-month ban that health workers said was put in place when authorities yielded to pressure from Islamic radicals. The governor of Kano, Ibrahim Shekarau, publicized the resumption by vaccinating his own infants in public in Takai, 50 miles east of Kano City, the state's capital. Muslim leaders have said the vaccines were part of a Western plot to spread the AIDS virus and infertility. The World Health Organization and other international organizations said the ban had helped spread crippling polio across Nigeria and into 10 other countries that had eradicated it. [View Article](#) (registration required)

Russia: Poisoning toll in Tula region rises to 63

29 July – ProMED reported that between 23 - 28 Jul 2004, 63 people -- 34 of them children aged 18 months to 14 years -- were hospitalized, with acute intestinal infections, in Novomoskovsk, Tula region. The region's chief sanitation doctor, Lidia Shishkina, said that tainted water is believed to have caused the poisoning. The emergency situations authorities, the prosecution service, and law enforcement have been alerted, and Russia's chief sanitation doctor, Gennady Onishchenko, has been notified, Shishkina said. Several possible scenarios behind the incident are being investigated, including terrorism. [View Source](#)

UN Agencies Fight Meningitis Epidemic in Northern Burundi

29 July 2004 – The UN News Centre reported that UN relief agencies are teaming up with the Government of Burundi to help fight a [meningitis](#) epidemic in the country's north, where 24 cases were confirmed last week. The UN Children's Fund and the World Health Organization have been helping the Government to treat patients and conduct a vaccination campaign. Some 400,000 people are targeted for vaccination this week. Almost 77,000 people were vaccinated last week. According to WHO, the "meningitis belt" in sub-Saharan Africa appears to be extending further south. [View Article](#)

USNORTHCOM

100 Deaths from Superbug in 18 Months in One Quebec Hospital

5 August – Medical News Today reported that in just one Quebec hospital, 100 people have died from superbugs in the last 18 months, says Dr Jacques Pepin, an infectious disease expert at the hospital. Dr. Pepin says that the incidence of [Clostridium difficile](#) at University Hospital, Sherbooke, Canada, among vulnerable patients has been increasing at an alarming rate. Between 1991 and 2003 the number of cases has increased 10 times (1000%). Dr Pepin's says 54 patients died at the hospital last year – so far this year the death toll has already reached 46. In 1991 5% of patients died within one month of diagnosis, in 2001 the figure soared to 14%. [View Article](#)

Four Infants Die in Hospital Germ Outbreak

30 July – The Houston Chronicle.com reported that doctors at Westchester Medical Center in New York are trying to find the source of a bacterial outbreak in the neonatal intensive care unit, where

seven infants have tested positive and four of them have died. Officials said three surviving infants are being treated with antibiotics; and that the outbreak has been contained and poses no risk to other patients. It was still unclear whether the bacteria had contributed to the four babies' deaths. The hospital's neonatal intensive care unit treats some of the sickest premature infants from the Hudson Valley region, New Jersey and Connecticut. Dr. Michael Gewitz, the center's director of pediatrics, emphasized on Friday that the babies in the unit were critically ill and therefore more vulnerable to the bacteria, acinetobacter. Gewitz said the medical center suspects that one of the babies imported the bacteria when it was transferred from another hospital. [View Source](#)

Job-Based Health Insurance Slips

3 August – CBS MarketWatch.com reported that the proportion of Americans under 65 with job-based coverage fell to 63 percent in 2003 from 67 percent in 2001 as job losses and a slow economic recovery separated nearly 9 million workers from their primary source of health care. It was the sharpest decline in employer coverage since the early 1990s recession, HSC President Paul Ginsburg said. Even so, many people who lost job-based coverage found a softer landing in social safety nets. Some states raised their income limits for Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). "The expansion of public enrollment roughly offsets or almost offsets the decline in employer coverage," Ginsburg said. Young adults had an especially pronounced drop in job-based health benefits, declining to 59.4 percent from nearly 65 percent in 2001. [View Article](#)

Johns Hopkins Launches Study of Free Home Test Kit for STD's

2 August – EurekAlert reported that researchers at Johns Hopkins have launched the first government-sponsored study to measure the effectiveness of a Web- and community-based home test kit for common sexually transmitted diseases, such as [Chlamydia](#) and [gonorrhea](#). The study will measure how many women make use of the kit, determine disease prevalence among respondents, record how effectively test results can be returned to the participants, and assess how well respondents who test positive follow through with therapy. Results will be available within two weeks via a secured telephone answering service that uses kit numbers and passwords. For women who test positive for Chlamydia or gonorrhea, a referral is also provided to a local community health clinic for treatment, as part of the confirmation telephone message. More than 500 kits are available as part of the initial pilot program. They are available at locations listed on the Web site: www.iwantthekit.org. [View Article](#)

Location Could Be Behind Gap in Health Care for Blacks

4 August – USA Today reported that experts have long tried to figure out why blacks receive poorer-quality health care than whites. Geography might be part of the problem: Doctors in largely black neighborhoods are more likely to say they have trouble providing high-quality care. An analysis of more than 150,000 visits by Medicare patients found that blacks and whites mostly go to doctors with different abilities and resources: 1) doctors caring for blacks were less likely to be board-certified in a specialized area of medicine. Non-certified doctors are less likely to screen their patients for diseases and more apt to treat symptoms rather than diagnose an underlying disease, 2) doctors who treated blacks more often said they had trouble referring patients to specialists, getting diagnostic imaging tests and admitting patients to hospitals for non-emergency care and 3) about 28% of visits by black patients — compared with 19% of visits by whites — were to doctors who said they could not consistently provide high-quality care. The study could help explain why blacks suffer disproportionately from many diseases. [View Article](#)

New Anti-AIDS Combinations Approved

4 August – Forbes.com reported that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved two new "fixed-dose combination drug treatments" for [HIV/AIDS](#). HIV/AIDS therapy generally requires simultaneous use of three or more drugs from different classes. Combination products bring together different HIV/AIDS drugs in a single medication or co-package, and help make treatment regimens less complicated for patients to follow, the FDA said. The new drug treatments are Epzicom (abacavir/lamivudine), manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline; and Truvada (tenofovir disoproxil/emtricitabine), which is made by Gilead Sciences, Inc., the agency said. "Simplifying treatment regimens by reducing the number of pills and times per day patients need to take them provides significant public health benefits," said Dr. Lester M. Crawford, acting FDA Commissioner. [View Article](#)

New York: Jamestown Canyon Virus Identified In Clinton County

5 August – ProMED reported that efforts to identify West Nile virus in Clinton County have led to the discovery of a new mosquito-borne virus in the area. A mosquito pool, collected in the Beekmantown area, tested positive for Jamestown Canyon virus. Jamestown Canyon virus is carried by an Aedes species mosquito that likes breeding in standing water found in trees stumps and wooded areas," said Adam Bouchard, who conducts mosquito surveillance in Clinton County. "It's a much larger mosquito [than the vector of West Nile virus]." Jamestown Canyon virus is one of 14 related viruses belonging to the species California encephalitis virus. Early symptoms include fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, headaches, and abdominal pain. Mammals, such as mice, chipmunks, and whitetail deer, may be carriers of Jamestown Canyon virus. [View Article](#)

Personality, Alcohol Abuse Disorders Common in U.S.

2 August – Reuters reported that about nine percent of Americans [abuse alcohol](#) and nearly 15 percent have a personality disorder. More than 9 percent have a mood disorder such as major [depression](#) or [manic disorder](#), while more than 11 percent have an [anxiety disorder](#). The survey, conducted by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, questioned 43,000 adults at length. The study projected that 4.2 million or 2 percent of Americans meet the criteria for a drug use disorder. It was aimed at finding how many people have a mental disorder that coincides with substance abuse. It found that about 20 percent of people with a substance use disorder also experience a mood or anxiety disorder at the same time. "It would be incorrect for health care professionals to assume that the majority of mood and anxiety disorders are due to substance intoxication or withdrawal and will remit when the patients stops drinking," said NIAAA Director Dr. Ting-Kai Li. A second part of the study found that in 2001-2002, 7.9 percent of all adults surveyed had obsessive-compulsive disorder; 4.4 percent had a paranoid personality disorder and 3.6 percent had an anti-social personality disorder. [View Article](#) [View News Release](#)

USPACOM

Asian Nations to Collaborate on Avian Flu

31 July – The New York Times reported that ten Southeast Asian countries agreed to form a new veterinary network to create and share the expertise needed to detect and control the spread of [avian flu](#). The network will provide basic training for veterinary workers, create ways to speed up exchanges of epidemiologic and laboratory information and better link veterinary and human health services. The strain of the avian influenza virus, known as A(H5N1), is gaining a stronger foothold in Asia. The Food and Agricultural Organization, a United Nations agency, is creating the network because it said control

of the disease required "unabated concerted action" and a strong regional response. "The magnitude of the outbreaks and the control of its rapid spread was well beyond the technical, institutional and economic capacities of a number of the affected countries," said Dr. He Changchui, an assistant director general of the organization. So far, A(H5N1) has infected 34 people, all in Thailand and Vietnam, and 25 cases were fatal. [View Article](#) (registration required)

Bangladesh: Diarrhea Outbreak Takes Alarming Turn In Flood Zones

4 August – Matamat.com reported that in Bangladesh, 9 people have died of [diarrhea](#) while 39 have been killed in flood-related incidents in the last 24 hours. Outbreaks of diarrhea have affected at least 7,445 people as millions of people remained in abject misery in the country's flood-hit areas. The affected people were also suffering from skin diseases as they come in contact with filthy sewerage waters. Meanwhile, 39 fresh flood-related deaths were reported from the affected areas across the country during the period, raising the total official death toll to 628 since the floods began engulfing vast areas of the country three weeks back. The government plans to feed some 20 million people on rations till December as they have been hardest hit in the devastating floods that washed away crops and wrecked infrastructures across the country. [View Article](#)

Bangladesh: UNICEF Alarmed By Respiratory Diseases in Flood Zones

4 August – Matamat.com reported that the floods in Bangladesh have also left an "exceptionally high" number of people suffering from [pneumonia](#) and other acute respiratory infections. Relief workers have reported over 550 cases of pneumonia and other acute respiratory infections, one of the biggest and fastest killers of Bangladeshi children, in camps in eastern Brahmanbaria district alone. Experts and aid agencies, however, have warned that Bangladesh is still at the start of the monsoon season and more rains could cause a major humanitarian crisis. [View Article](#)

China to Send Voluntary Medical Team to Tibet

5 August – HindustanTimes.com reported that China will send a medical team of 10 volunteers, including a Polish gynecologist, to the remote Himalayan region of Tibet to offer pregnant women and infants better medical care. The team will head for the Ngari Prefecture of southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region for nearly 20 days. Since 2000, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation has provided needy families with medical services for childbearing and post-natal care in the country's vast western areas. Atrocious natural conditions and backward economic development in the west have caused a much higher mortality of pregnant women and newborns there than in the prosperous eastern coastal areas. [View Article](#)

Dengue Fever Outbreak Reported In Palau

3 August – KPUA.net reported that Guam residents returning from the Festival of Pacific Arts in Palau are being advised to be alert to symptoms of [dengue](#) fever. The US territory's Department of Public Health and Social Services says a dengue fever outbreak was confirmed in Palau just as the festival ended in Koror. About six-thousand people from 26 Pacific Rim countries, territories and the state of Hawaii were in Palau to showcase their traditional art and culture. Dengue fever is spread by infected mosquitoes. Public health officials say symptoms include fever, severe headaches and eye, joint and muscle pain. [View Source](#)

Health Officials Warn Of Meningitis Outbreak

4 August - The Hawaii Channel.com reported that the State Health Department said Hawaii has been suffering from an outbreak of pediatric [viral meningitis](#). A number of cases of the flu like disease have been treated at Wilcox Hospital on Kauai, and cases have been reported at hospitals on Oahu recently. The disease is usually not serious and patients almost always get better on their own. Symptoms include high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, discomfort looking into bright lights, confusion and sleepiness. There are different viruses that cause viral meningitis, but they all irritate the lining of the brain. [View Article](#)

Life at Academy Settles After Outbreak

30 July – TaiwanNews.com reported that life at the R.O.C. Military Academy in Fengshan, southern Taiwan returned to normal yesterday after a total of 24 cadets came down with fevers days ago due to a yet undetermined cause and were hospitalized, with one of the cadets having died. The Department of Health is trying to determine the cause of the massive outbreak of high fever and coughing among student cadets. A cadet surnamed Yen, 20, died because of multiple organ failure. DOH experts conducted an autopsy yesterday on Yen's body to determine the cause of death. They had already ruled out the possibility of dengue fever, severe acute respiratory syndrome or Japanese meningitis in their initial investigation. [View Article](#)

U.N. Officials Move on Bird Flu Vaccines

31 July - The Seattle Post-Intelligencer.com reported that the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization moved toward loosening its stand on vaccinating fowl against the [bird flu](#) virus. The new guidelines give affected nations more leeway to use vaccinations than the FAO had previously suggested. International health and agricultural authorities had earlier promoted culling mainly due to the epidemic's massive scale and quick spread. Experts had also worried that vaccination could present problems such as controlling the vaccine's quality and availability. There are also more labor costs, since each bird has to be vaccinated twice. The FAO has changed its stance because it now has more evidence that ducks and wild birds spread the disease, raising the overall risk factor for animals and humans alike - so every viable option should be used. The new guidelines still call for culling and sanitary measures as the first line of defense. [View Source](#)

USSOUTHCOM

Paraguay: UN Agencies Muster Aid for Survivors of Disastrous Fire

4 August 2004 – The UN News Centre reported that UN agencies are mobilizing aid for Paraguay in response to a government request for assistance in dealing with the aftermath of Sunday's disastrous mall fire that killed nearly 380 people, wounded 170 more and left 43 others missing. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is sending support experts to train volunteers in helping both adults and youngsters overcome the emotional and psychological trauma. The agency has also provided two freezers to stock blood donations. UNICEF has also provided two computers and the UN Development Programme is acquiring three more to support SUMA software, frequently used to manage the flood of relief supplies that often arrive in the aftermath of disasters. [View Article](#)

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