

USACHPPM
HEALTH INFORMATION OPERATIONS (HIO) UPDATE

28 February 2003

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.

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HOT ISSUES

AIDS Vaccine Gets Mixed Reviews

24 February – CBS News reported a highly anticipated experimental AIDS vaccine failed to protect most people from the disease in its first major trial, although it did show promise in protecting blacks and Asians, its developer said. The overall expected rate of infection was not reduced in the high-risk people who volunteered to take the vaccine, VaxGen Inc. said late Sunday. However, the expected infection rate for the 314 black volunteers who received the vaccine was reduced by 78 percent -- a finding the researchers said was unexpected. The rate was reduced by 67 percent for all nonwhite volunteers other than Hispanics. "This is the first time we have specific numbers to suggest that a vaccine has prevented HIV infection in humans," VaxGen vice president Phillip Berman said in a prepared statement Sunday. "We're not sure yet why certain groups have a better immune response." The Brisbane, Calif.-based company plans to continue developing the vaccine and will examine more closely why it worked better in blacks and Asians than it did in whites and Hispanics. [View Article](#)

CDC Finds Lapses in Hospital Hygiene

21 February – MSNBC News reported if the doctor doesn't wash his hands, the nurses, residents and medical students under his supervision probably won't wash up either, a study found. Overall, hospital staff members in the study washed their hands about half of the time after contact with a patient. But the influence of a senior doctor was so great that if he did not wash his hands while making rounds, the staffers with him washed up only about 10 percent of the time. The study was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Chicago's Northwestern Memorial Hospital. The findings underscore the need to educate hospital "role models" to wash their hands so that "students or technicians see it's an important

part of patient care,” said Dr. William Trick, a CDC epidemiologist. The study observed handwashing practices at the hospital’s old and new facilities in 1998 and 1999. It found that better access to sinks did not always lead to better hygiene. Workers washed up more frequently at the old hospital (53 % of the time) than at the new hospital (23 % of the time).

[View Article](#)

Chemical Stops Stroke Damage

23 February – BBC News reported people who have a high level of an anti-inflammatory agent are protected from stroke damage, researchers have found. A chemical called interleukin-10 (IL-10) appears to have a protective effect on the brain. The US researchers say their finding may suggest a new way to minimize the damage done to the brain after a stroke, as well as possibly reducing the incidence of stroke death and improving recovery. It was found that patients with low levels of IL-10 in their blood during the first hours after stroke were three times more likely to have worsening neurological symptoms. If patients had a concentration of less than 6 picograms of IL-10 per milliliters in their blood plasma, they were likely to see a worsening of their condition within 48 hours. [View Article](#)

Coffee Pregnancy Warning

21 February – BBC News reported drinking too much coffee during pregnancy raises the risk of stillbirth, research suggests. Scientists in Denmark found that pregnant women who drink eight or more cups of coffee a day run more than twice the risk of stillbirth compared with women who do not drink coffee. The researchers focused on 18,478 pregnant women who booked for delivery at Aarhus University Hospital between 1989 and 1996. The women completed two questionnaires, providing information such as medical history, smoking habits, alcohol and coffee consumption. The risk of stillbirth increased with the number of cups of coffee a day during pregnancy. Compared with women who did not drink any coffee, women who drank four to seven cups a day had an 80% increased risk of stillbirth, and women who drank eight or more cups a day a 300% increased risk. [View Article](#)

Dirty Needles Research Rejected

20 February – BBC News reported the United Nations has disputed the findings of United States researchers that say most HIV infections in Africa result from dirty medical needles. The suggestion that the spread of the virus that can cause AIDS is closely linked to unsafe medical care challenges widely held scientific views. The research estimates about 60% of people with HIV in Africa become infected mainly through contaminated needles rather than through sexual contact, but the UNAIDS organization puts the figure at nearer 5%. UNAIDS says the conclusions they have drawn are not supported by adequate studies. Catherine Hankins, UNAIDS chief scientific adviser, expressed her concerns. "We're concerned that a report like this might tend to make people drop their guard and not use condoms, when it's exactly using condoms that is required at this point. [View Article](#)

Kids Sickened by Eating Cigarettes

24 February – The Daily Yomiuri reported on a Japanese study, which showed that more than 45 percent of accidents in which young children ingest daily household items involve infants eating cigarettes, or cigarette butts. The ministry collected reports of 886 such accidents in 2001

from eight pediatric clinics selected from across the nation. Of these, 401 cases, or 45.3 percent, involved children eating cigarettes. Infants aged between six and 17 months accounted for 91 percent of the cases involving cigarettes, according to the survey. The authors are calling on parents to be particularly alert to the danger of using empty cans as ashtrays, as many of the children who mistakenly ingested cigarettes did so by drinking from a can they thought contained a normal beverage. [View Report](#)

Longer Use of Antidepressants Advised

21 February – MSNBC News reported many patients suffering from depression would benefit from long-term use of antidepressants, a team of international researchers says. Patients are normally treated with drugs for about four to six months to relieve symptoms, but results from studies show longer courses of treatment would prevent many patients from suffering relapses. Guy Goodwin, a professor of psychiatry at Oxford University in England, and researchers in Britain, Japan and the United States found extending treatment with all types of antidepressants for at least a year offers more benefits to patients. The findings reported in The Lancet medical journal are based on a review of data from 31 trials involving 4,400 patients suffering from depression. All patients had completed the standard treatment with antidepressants and were randomly selected to continue the drugs or to receive a placebo. Goodwin and colleagues found patients in the placebo group had double the rate of relapse compared to those on treatment. [View Article](#)

Mediterranean Diet May Help Arthritis

19 February – MSNBC News reported a Mediterranean diet, rich in olive oil, fish, poultry, fruit and vegetables, can relieve the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, scientists said on Wednesday. Although a Mediterranean diet is usually recommended to reduce the risk of heart disease, a study in Sweden found it reduced the pain and improved the physical function of people with rheumatoid arthritis. After three months on the diet, arthritis patients lost an average of 6.6 pounds, had lower cholesterol levels and less pain in their joints than a control group patients who did not change their eating habits. “The treated group felt significantly improved compared to the controls after three months with this diet,” said Dr. Lars Skoldstam, who led the study. [View Article](#)

Mercury Threat to Kids Up, Delayed Report Warns

20 February – Reuters reported an environmental report warning that emissions of mercury by coal-fired power plants and other industrial sources poses an increasing health danger to young children has been delayed for nine months, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report is to be released soon, officials told the Journal, after being subjected to an unusual level of scrutiny by other federal agencies, including the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy. People familiar with the final report, originally due last May, told the newspaper the study finds that mercury poses a serious health problem for children. A partial draft, titled "America's Children and the Environment," notes that states increasingly are issuing warnings about dangerous mercury levels in fish, the article said. It says there is mounting evidence that mercury is collecting in the blood of women of childbearing age. [View Article](#)

Nutrient Could Help Prevent Deadly Malaria

21 February – Reuters reported a nutrient that is produced naturally in the body and found in some foods could be a potential new treatment for malaria. A team of international researchers who studied 75 children in Africa discovered that those with the lowest levels of the nutrient arginine suffered the most severe effects of malaria. They believe that combining arginine, which is used to treat heart and circulatory diseases, with anti-malaria drugs could be a more effective way of combating the mosquito-borne disease that kills someone every 30 seconds. The malaria expert at the Menzies School of Public Health in Darwin, Australia and colleagues in the United States and Tanzania discovered that extremely low levels of arginine and too little of the chemical nitric oxide were linked to the most serious cases of malaria. The researchers believe higher levels of arginine and nitric oxide could increase blood flow and stop blood cells infected with the parasite from sticking to the lining of blood vessels. Because arginine works differently from anti-malaria drugs it could be used effectively with existing treatments. It is cheap and has already been shown to be effective in treating other illnesses, the researchers said. [View Report](#)

On-The-Job Back Pain Influenced by Social Climate

20 February – Reuters reported new research suggests that an unpleasant workplace environment can also damage workers' backs. Dr. Janet M. Johnston and her colleagues discovered that people who are unhappy at work and are forced to work under intense and hectic conditions are more likely to feel back pain than others. These findings suggest that managers who want to take the health of their employees into consideration need to focus on both the physical and the psychological risks of pain, Johnston said. "We found that (psychological risks of back pain) were just as important as the physical side," Johnston told Reuters Health. Although creating a calmer, more relaxed environment for employees may cost money or sacrifice productivity, Johnston noted that treating back pain is an extremely expensive venture, and companies shell out mega-bucks for health insurance and workers' compensation. [View Article](#)

Red Cross Urges Americans to Prepare for Terrorism

20 February – Reuters reported the American Red Cross unveiled a campaign urging Americans nervous about the threat of terrorism to prepare their homes for a possible attack and volunteer in their communities. The plan advises Americans to stockpile a three-day supply of water and non-perishable food as well as first aid kits, medications and tools including flashlights. The announcement came a day after the Bush Administration made public a similar preparedness effort. The campaigns target a nation on edge in its third week of high terror threat alert. Administration officials raised the threat alert level in the first week of February. American Red Cross president Marsha Evans said that the group's campaign was designed to complement the government's efforts to educate as much of the public as possible about terrorism and disaster preparedness. A complete outline of the Red Cross preparedness campaign is available at www.redcross.org. More information on the government's readiness campaign can be viewed at www.ready.gov. [View Article](#)

USEUCOM

Flu Outbreak Strikes Georgia

19 February – BBC News reported the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, is in a grip of a flu outbreak that has left at least two people dead. All schools in the city have been closed until the end of the month. Nearly 1,000 people are said to have sought emergency medical treatment. The flu outbreak, involving the Moscow-99 strain of the virus, is expected to reach its peak later this week. [View Article](#)

Italians Promise Early BSE Test

21 February – BBC News reported Italian researchers are developing what could be a breakthrough test to detect mad cow disease (BSE), state television reports. A team from Verona and Padova found that the prion that causes mad cow disease can be found not only in the brain, but also in the nose of infected animals, Italian television reported. Current tests to detect the disease can either be done during an autopsy or by surgically removing samples of tissues. But the new test can reportedly be carried out on live animals in the initial stages of the fatal brain disease, with swift and accurate results. It would speed up the diagnosis, cut down costs and avoid mass slaughter of cattle, the report said. [View Article](#)

Meningitis Kills 401 Since October

21 February – AllAfrica.com reported meningitis has killed 401 people out of 2433 cases in Burkina Faso since the beginning of the 2002-2003 meningitis season in late October, Souleymane Sanou, head of meningitis control in the health ministry said. Sanou, speaking in an interview on the national radio, said analyses of the cases show persistence of the new W135 meningitis strain that was first reported a year ago. Before that time, Burkina Faso was only affected by the A and C strains. Five health districts out of 53 in the country had been declared meningitis epidemic areas, the official said. These included Batie in the South West, Manga, Po in the south Pama and Diapaga in the east. Each of these districts had reported 10 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. Some 150,000 doses of the 500,000 trivalent (A,C,W135) vaccine doses sent last week by the World Health Organization (WHO) to contain the epidemic will be allocated to these areas. [View Article](#)

Burundi: Cholera Epidemic Continues to Ravage Rumonge

24 February – AllAfrica.com reported a cholera epidemic in Burundi's Rumonge District, Bururi Province, peaked on Tuesday with 57 people hospitalized, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In a situation report for 17-23 February, OCHA said five cholera-related deaths had been recorded in the week under review. The International Rescue Committee [IRC] continues to provide clean water and disinfectant powder to Rumonge hospitals and affected neighborhoods, and to distribute, soap and water-treatment tablets. It has also begun spraying neighborhoods and schools with disinfectant.

Nigeria: Epidemic Kills 15 Children

23 February – AllAfrica.com reported some 15 children have been reported dead in an outbreak of measles in the Avjara Local Government Area of Jigawa State. The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that the deaths occurred in the last two weeks at Kalgo, Darai and Avjara villages of the council area. Confirming the deaths, the council secretary, Magaji Avjara, said that officials of the state government as well as the relevant agencies had been alerted on the situation. He said the council lacked the capacity to intervene due to inadequate funds, and appeal led to the state government to respond to the emergency situation. The permanent secretary in the state ministry of health, Abdulaziz Abdulkamid, however denied receiving any report on the outbreak of the child-killer disease, but said the appropriate agency has been directed to react to the problem. [View Article](#)

Nuke Vets May Have Raised Risk of Leukemia-Study

24 February – ABC News reported British veterans of nuclear weapons tests in the Pacific Ocean 50 years ago are no more likely to develop cancer than other men but scientists said they may have an increased risk of leukemia. In one of the largest and longest studies of its kind, researchers from Britain's National Radiological Protection Board, or NRPB, compared cancer rates and deaths of 20,000 men who took part in nuclear tests and a similar number who served in sub-tropical areas but did not go to test sites. They found that the overall rates of cancer and mortality in general were fairly similar among those who took part in the tests and those who didn't but there is still some suggestion there may be a raised risk of leukemia, other than chronic lymphatic leukemia (CLL), among the people who took part in the tests. The veterans who participated in the nuclear testing had various jobs. Some flew over test sites and others were involved in decontamination. But the scientists said they found no indication that a particular job was associated with any difference in cancer risk. [View article](#)

Republic of the Congo: Ebola Fever Outbreak Death Toll Now 75

25 February – ProMed reported the toll from the Ebola outbreak in Congo has risen to 75 deaths among 93 cases, but is believed to be under control, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tue 25 Feb 2003. The outbreak in the Kelle and Mbomo districts near the central African country's border with Gabon is thought by scientists to have been caused by the consumption of infected monkey meat. An isolation ward has been set up in Kelle hospital where people are coming to be treated. This is encouraging given that up to now it was difficult to persuade people that they needed medical intervention. Local officials said last week that many villagers believed occult forces were at work, leading some to stone and beat to death 4 teachers accused of casting an evil spell to cause the outbreak. [View Report](#)

Scotland: Outbreak of Brucellosis

21 February – ProMed reported bovine brucellosis was confirmed in a Scottish herd for the first time in 30 years. Brucellosis, a highly contagious bacterial disease that can be transferred to humans, was discovered in 2 imported cattle from the Republic of Ireland at a farm in Forfar. If unchecked, the infection can cut a herd's productivity, causing heifers to abort and trigger undulant fever, a chronic debilitating disease in humans. The British mainland was believed to have eradicated the disease, with the last case in Scotland reported in the 1970s. The animals had been under restriction since 11 Feb 2003, and surveillance and testing will continue to

ensure that the outbreak has been eradicated. The farm at the center of the scare is a mixed beef and sheep enterprise that does not sell milk. Any risk to humans is through direct contact with the aborted animal. [View Report](#)

South Africa: Cholera Outbreak Claims 14 Victims

24 February – AllAfrica.com reported hundreds of villagers in the Tsomo, Cofimvaba areas of the Eastern Cape have been struck by waterborne disease for the first time. So far, 14 people have died of the disease and more than 800 people in the Oliver Tambo and Chris Hani districts of the former Transkei have been treated for cholera. Local authorities have established a joint task team to co-ordinate government's response to the outbreak, which includes bleach for water purification and an emergency water sanitation program. These are only temporary measures and authorities want to put in place a permanent water supply system here and in other similar areas to stamp out this problem once and for all. Johnny Douglas, task team head and director of health and social services in the Chris Hani district municipality said: "We are baffled by the origin of the bacteria. This is the first time in the history of this area that we have cholera." [View Article](#)

Uganda: 5 Million Face Risk of Sleeping Sickness

24 February – AllAfrica.com reported tsetse flies have spread to 70 percent of the country, putting 5.1 million people at a risk of catching sleeping sickness. The tsetse flies and the diseases they cause are spreading to areas that were formerly free. Minister of State for Fisheries said sleeping sickness and nagana (the strain which affects cattle) were spreading to Kumi, Soroti and Kaberamaido districts where they had not been known before. She said 40 percent of cattle in Uganda risk catching nagana. She said government is fighting the disease, but it is being hampered by lack of enough money. In addition, sleeping sickness and nagana are common in West Nile region and Mukono, Kayunga, Jinja, Mayuge, Bugiri, Tororo, Mbale and Pallisa districts. Adjumani district recorded 90 cases of sleeping sickness last year. [View Article](#)

USCENTCOM

Afghanistan: Focus on Tuberculosis

20 February – IRIN News reported tuberculosis (TB) continues to be of major concern to health experts in Afghanistan. About 80 percent of all cases worldwide will occur within a group of 22 countries, with Afghanistan having one of the highest rates of incidence. While there are no precise statistics due to problems of access, reports indicate an increase in the number of reported cases. "There are an estimated 150,000 people suffering from TB in Afghanistan today", said Dr Giampaolo Mezzabotta, a TB medical officer for the World Health Organization (WHO). Based on epidemiological calculations, 70,000 new cases are estimated annually, with some 20,000 people dying each year. However, the notification rate was actually much lower as many people lacked adequate access to treatment, and therefore simply sickened and died. The health expert said that of every 100 patients infected with TB today and left without treatment for two years, 50 would die, 25 would recover, and 25 percent would survive as

chronic cases and potential infectors of others. According to the WHO, left untreated, each person with active TB will infect on average between 10 and 15 people every year. [View Report](#)

Chicken Warnings Aren't for the Birds

25 February – ABC News reported military front-line units have been buying up chickens in Kuwait to use them as a crude kind of early-warning system in case of a chemical attack. "Poultry have very weak respiratory systems," said Brown, who used to raise organic chickens on his family farm in upstate New York. "They're like a canary in a coal mine. They'll die first. So it's a good indication of a gas attack. The chickens will be deployed with the troops if there is a war with Iraq. They will be posted like sentries and watched carefully to see if they succumb to poisonous gases. These decidedly low-tech chemical detectors may turn out to be more valuable than anyone expected. High-tech detectors can malfunction, but chickens won't. [View Article](#)

New Way to Tackle Malnutrition

25 February – AllAfrica.com reported a radical new approach for treating severe malnutrition, which experts say will save thousands of lives, was unveiled in Ethiopia. Nutrition experts said the new method involves treating a series of micronutrients rather than targeting protein - which was traditionally seen as the treatment for certain types of malnutrition. Dr. Golden, emeritus professor at Aberdeen University in Scotland, said that often health experts will give high doses of protein or salts, which end up killing the patient. He added that in hospitals around Africa, death rates for treating severe malnutrition are in excess of 40 percent. But by using the new approach - which has been devised over the last 20 years - the figure can be reduced to about 2 percent. The method is being used in countries like Burundi and Prof Golden said it would be expanded to cover Ethiopia. [View Article](#)

UN Vaccinating Iraqi Children as War Threat Looms

24 February – Reuters Health reported health teams spearheaded by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) are fanning out across Iraq in an effort to immunize more than 4 million Iraqi children against polio and measles. An outbreak of polio in Iraq in 1999 led to increased vaccination efforts in that country. Although no cases have been reported since 2000, vaccinating all Iraqi children remains key to stop polio from reemerging in the region, especially since it is a disease that crosses borders easily. To do that, UNICEF has joined forces with 14,000 Iraqi health workers in a door-to-door campaign aimed at identifying and then vaccinating children at risk. At the same time, UNICEF hopes to spot children who may have missed measles vaccination, as well. UNICEF estimates that close to a half-million Iraqi children under five years of age may remain unvaccinated. Finding these children is an important undertaking since measles epidemics could spread rapidly through refugee camps should war occurs. War could greatly exacerbate disease risks for children in Iraq, which already has one of the highest child-mortality rates in the world, with one in every eight children dying before the age of five. [View Article](#)

USNORTHCOM

Blacks in South Face US's Highest Stroke Death Rate

20 February – Reuters reported African Americans living in certain parts of the southern US face the nation's highest risk of dying from a stroke, a large study released Thursday concludes. Specifically, black men and women 35 and older who lived in South and North Carolina, some rural southern Georgia counties, and counties in Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee were at higher risk of dying from a stroke than anyone else in the US, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) based on 1991-1998 statistics. African Americans are known to have a higher risk of stroke than other groups. According to the report, blacks were 40% more likely to die of strokes than whites, and their stroke death risk was double that of Hispanics and Native Americans. The CDC conducted the study with West Virginia University and the University of South Florida. Titled The Atlas of Stroke Mortality, it is the third in a series of CDC atlases on cardiovascular diseases and the first to show county-by-county stroke death rates. [View Article](#)

Landmines For Motorists

20 February – CBS News reported according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 17,448 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in 2001, accounting for 41 percent of all U.S. traffic deaths. Both studies, conducted by the Washington-based AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, evaluated habitual offenders. In one, researchers found that unlicensed drivers are five times more likely to be in fatal crashes than drivers with valid licenses. The other study found that 40 percent of all drunken driving trips are made by habitual drunken drivers, and that more than half of all arrested drunken drivers are repeat offenders. [View Article](#)

Mexico: Dengue Fever Outbreak in Puerto Vallarta

24 February – According to Mexican health officials, Dengue Fever has killed 2 and immobilized hundreds in the resort city of Puerto Vallarta's poorer neighborhoods in recent months. To contain the mosquito-borne virus, health officials have determined that the best strategy is not expensive fumigating or hunting for an elusive vaccine. Rather, it's persuading city dwellers to get rid of or cover up the old tires, cases of empty soda bottles, birdbaths, and collectibles that clutter many yards. That eliminates the standing water in which mosquitoes breed. And that, residents are told, reduces the spread of the incredibly painful and sometimes fatal malady. The Puerto Vallarta area had not had a case of dengue in 3 years. But since the fall, health officials have treated 346 cases, including 32 cases of the potentially lethal dengue hemorrhagic fever. 2 people died in the city, while 2 others died in the Gulf Coast state of Quintana Roo. There have been cases of American tourists contracting the virus in Mexican resorts and bringing it home with them. [View Report](#)

New World Screwworm *Cochliomyia hominivorax* in Mexico

21 February – ProMed reported on 2 screwworm outbreaks in Mexico. Screwworm is a parasitic disease carried by flies. It affects cattle (and can be transmitted to humans by eating infected cows). To control the spread of the parasite, flies that are engineered to be sterile are released into the environment in order to control the proliferation of the species of fly. On 28 Jan 2003, due to a failure in the sterilization process at the Sterile Flies Production Plant Irradiating Unit No. 2, fertile flies were released from release chambers situated around the plant. The outbreaks are currently located in the state of Chiapas in the district where the plant is located. Neighboring districts are now at an increased risk of an outbreak as are the farms throughout Central America that might have received flies from this plant. Control measures are in effect. [View Report](#)

Ontario: Doctors Say Number of WNV Fatalities in 2002 Underestimated

20 February – ProMed reported West Nile virus killed at least 8 Ontario residents during last year's mosquito season, the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health has reported, and 3 other fatalities may be linked to the virus. Most of those deaths took place in the Greater Toronto Area, said Dr. Colin D'Cunha. However, doctors with the Canadian Infectious Disease Society said the provincial death toll is underestimated and they expect it to climb. They predict there have been 11 deaths attributed to West Nile virus infection in Greater Toronto Area hospitals alone. Doctors estimate the number of suspected symptomatic cases of West Nile virus infection in Ontario last year totaled nearly 1000, health experts heard yesterday during a Canadian Infectious Disease Society teleconference. The Society's numbers differ from those given out by D'Cunha because he is reporting only cases confirmed through Canada's Federal Infectious Disease Lab in Winnipeg. Dr. Coleman Rotstein, a Hamilton infectious disease expert who is also President of the Society said Confirmation from Winnipeg usually takes a couple of months and there is a lag time. This made it appear that there were fewer cases than there really were. [View Report](#)

Survey Finds Bioterror Knowledge Gaps in Canada ERs

20 February – Reuters reported emergency wards in the Canadian province of Quebec may be unable to quickly recognize or respond to a bioterror attack, despite increased awareness of the threat, according to a new study. Less than 10% of Quebecois ER doctors and nurses could accurately identify certain bioterrorism-related illnesses, though they did understand how to manage them properly, researchers reported at a recent meeting of the Society for Critical Care Medicine in San Antonio, Texas. Researchers administered a questionnaire to 57 doctors and 50 nurses in 11 Quebec emergency rooms. Study participants had to look at photographs of people with Ebola or smallpox and diagnose the condition. Both diseases are listed as high risk for potential use as biological weapons by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Only about 4% of participants could identify the case of Ebola and roughly 9% recognized smallpox, though most physicians correctly diagnosed control cases. The researchers recommend creating and distributing learning tools to emergency rooms, such as a photo quiz and a list of steps to follow in case of a suspected bioterrorism attack. [View Article](#)

Wasting Disease Found in Deer in Utah, New Mexico

20 February – Reuters reported chronic wasting disease (CWD), a wildlife illness related to mad cow disease, has emerged for the first time in Utah's deer herd, state officials said in a statement. The disease was confirmed in brain tissue from a male mule deer shot by a hunter last fall near Vernal, in northeastern Utah. Two new cases were recently reported in New Mexico, where the disease was found last year. CWD causes symptoms in deer and elk that are similar to mad cow disease, formally known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy. Both disorders involve prions, misshapen proteins that destroy the brain. Unlike mad cow, CWD has never been shown to spread to cattle or humans. However, health experts have advised against eating venison or other parts of infected animals. [View Article](#)

USPACOM

257 Killed in Western China Earthquake

24 February – Japan Today reported a powerful earthquake struck China's far western Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Monday, killing 257 people and injuring more than 1,000. The magnitude 6.8 earthquake, the most serious to hit the remote area in decades, occurred at 10:03 a.m., the office said. China's official Xinhua News Agency quoted local officials as saying more than 1,000 houses and school buildings collapsed in a village in Bachu County, the focus of the trembler, located more than 3,300 kilometers west-northwest of Beijing. The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake had a magnitude of 6.3, and placed its location 100 km east of the ancient Silk Road town of Kashgar. [View Article](#)

Estimated 1.5 Mil in Japan Have Hepatitis C Virus

23 February – Japan Today reported about 1.5 million people in Japan are estimated to have contracted hepatitis C virus (HCV) based on a survey of blood donors over a five-year period, a health ministry study group said Saturday. The group from the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry presented the findings at an informational meeting on the survey that involved about 3.48 million first-time blood donors over the period between 1995 and 2000. The findings showed that about 0.5% of the blood donors had been found with antibodies, of which 30% were those who had contracted HCV in the past. Based on the data, the group said it expects there to be about 800,000 people with HCV up to the age of 65. Blood donation in Japan is only allowed until that age. Combining that number with an estimated 3% of people aged over 65, the percentage believed to have HCV in the age bracket, the group said the overall number of people with HCV in Japan would come to 1.5 million. [View Article](#)

Fight Against Iodine Deficiency Effective in China, Survey Shows

21 February – The People Daily reported using iodized salt to prevent Iodine Deficiency Disorder (IDD) in China has proved very effective, according to China's fourth IDD survey findings released. The survey shows nearly 90 percent of the Chinese population now consume iodized salt, up from 40 percent in 1995, and people are enjoying an increasingly balanced diet. The iodine content in children's food basically meets the criteria suggested by the World Health Organization, and in 2002 only 5.8 percent of 8 to 10-year-olds suffered from struma, thyroid

enlargement due to iodine deficiency, down from 20.4 percent in 1995 and close to the global norm of 5 percent, the survey showed. [View Article](#)

India Cracks Down on Bottled Water Firms

21 February - Hoovers Online reported the government has withdrawn quality certificates given to some of India's most popular brands of bottled water and may close some bottling plants after sample tests found high pesticide levels, officials said. India's Bureau of Standards revoked the certificates for water produced at five plants, including one operated by Bisleri International, which makes one of India's most popular drinking water brands, according to inspection results made available to The Associated Press on Thursday. The documents also showed that Indian branches of multinational companies PepsiCo Inc. and Coca-Cola Co. have been warned about improving their equipment and testing procedures. The inspections come amid public concern about pesticide-contaminated water, with officials launching new efforts to enforce the government's hygiene standards for bottled water. Pesticide levels are generally high in many parts of the country, and regulators are finding that bottling plants are not filtering water adequately. The government's inspections are continuing, and bureau officials said hygiene shortcomings were likely to be discovered at other plants. [View Article](#)

Japan: 30% of Subways Fail Smoke Safety Standards

21 February – Japan Today reported the transport ministry said 150 subway stations in five Japanese cities, or 30% of such stations nationwide, fail to meet smoke control safety standards and 99 fail evacuation route requirements. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport said the smoke control facilities in these stations, under the management of six subway operators, were built before such standards had been stipulated, and this may pose difficulties in improving the setup. But Toshiki Aoyama, the ministry's vice minister, appears set to expedite the improvement of these facilities. The ministry conducted the emergency inspections on fire-prevention measures at 574 stations of 11 subway operators nationwide in the wake of a fatal subway fire Tuesday in South Korea. [View Article](#)

Malnutrition Rate Drops in North Korea

20 February – VOA News reported U.N. officials say malnutrition has dropped significantly in communist North Korea in the past four years and are calling on donor nations to boost food aid so famine does not return. The United Nations and the North Korea government have released a new survey showing a marked cut in malnutrition since 1998. The number of underweight children in North Korea fell from more than 60 percent four years ago to just 21 percent and chronic malnutrition has dropped by a third. Officials say foreign food aid is clearly making an impact, but warn that gains could quickly be wiped out if foreign donations fall off. [View Article](#)

More Dengue Outbreaks

24 February - ProMed reported on 3 more dengue fever alerts in USPACOM locations. The first is in Kochi, India. The number of Dengue fever cases had risen to 71 this year from 25 cases last year. Officials there have decided to form a squad of 5 members for every 50 houses in wards of village Panchayat and councils in the corporation to make door-to-door visits and destroy potential mosquito breeding points. Dengue is also increasing in Bangkok, Thailand. In January 2003 alone, health officials in Thailand discovered some 800 cases of dengue fever in

and around Bangkok. Health authorities in Bangkok are predicting more people could catch the disease this year than in 2001, when fear of dengue fever caused panic. There is also an increase in dengue cases in Phuket, Thailand. About 10 people in Phuket had dengue fever in February of 2002, but almost 30 people have contracted it in February 2003. The rising number of people contracting dengue fever has prompted the Phuket Public Health Office (PPHO) to issue a public health warning and to implement a mosquito-culling program. [View Reports](#)

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Bolivia: Foot and Mouth Disease

20 February – ProMed reported the Bolivian National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Service (Senasag) has reported an outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in Trinidad (state of Beni), in the north-central part of this Andean country, within the Amazon ecosystem. Carlos Salinas, head of Senasag's FMD program, reported that the Bolivian technicians had applied the international rules: interdiction of the outbreak, ring vaccination, and cattle movement control. Salinas informed that 50,000 animals have been vaccinated in the peri-focal area, that laboratory analyses determined that the acting virus corresponds to the O strain, and that the Bolivian national timeline for vaccination will begin in the states of Beni, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cochabamba, and Pando. Since Bolivia is an FMD-infected country where vaccination is practiced, Argentina's permanent border controls have been reinforced. In addition, although authorities do not inspect the commercial traffic of merchandise susceptible to FMD, they have increased the controls to prevent the introduction of products through local cross-border traffic. [View Report](#)

Ecuador: Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever Reaches Epidemic Levels

24 February – ProMed reported dengue hemorrhagic fever has reached epidemic levels in Ecuador, as heavy rains pound the Pacific coast and make it tough to control the deadly disease. This cash-strapped Andean nation declared a sanitary emergency a week ago in a bid to channel funds to fumigate coastal regions and treat patients with the potentially lethal dengue hemorrhagic fever. National Health Director Javier Carrillo told Reuters that the disease had already reached epidemic proportions with 22 cases so far this year. This exceeds by 2 the total number of cases recorded during the whole of 2002. [View Report](#)

Please contact the below-listed POC for suggested improvements and/or comments regarding this report. This report is also available on the USACHPPM website at <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/Hiouupdate/>.

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