

USACHPPM

HEALTH INFORMATION OPERATIONS (HIO) UPDATE

17 September 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

Byproduct of Water-Disinfection Process Found to be Highly Toxic

14 September – EurekAlert reported that a recently discovered disinfection byproduct (DBP) found in US drinking water treated with chloramines, a combination of chlorine and ammonia, is the most toxic ever found. The discovery raises health-related questions regarding an EPA plan to encourage all US water-treatment facilities to adopt chlorine alternatives, said Michael J. Plewa, a genetic toxicologist in the department of crop sciences. "This research says that when you go to alternatives, you may be opening a Pandora's box of new DBPs, and these unregulated DBPs may be much more toxic, by orders of magnitude, than the regulated ones we are trying to avoid." One of the five iodoacids detailed in the study, iodoacetic acid, is the most toxic and DNA-damaging to mammalian cells in tests of known DBPs, Plewa said. [View Article](#)

Chronology: Key Dates in Asian Bird Flu Outbreak

9 September – Reuters provided a brief chronology of the spread of [avian flu](#) from 15 December 2003 when South Korea confirmed a highly contagious type of bird flu at a chicken farm near Seoul and began a mass cull of poultry up until 9 September 2004 when Thailand said the H5N1 bird flu had killed a young man, raising the death toll from the virus in Asia to 29 this year. Twenty people have died from bird flu in Vietnam and eight in Thailand this year. [View Chronology](#)

Hepatitis C Recurrence after Liver Transplantation

9 September – EurekAlert reported that [hepatitis C](#) recurs with severity more often in individuals who receive liver transplants from living donors compared with those who get transplants from cadavers. Hepatitis C recurs in all patients after liver transplantation, but certain factors, such as high viral load and increased donor age, have been associated with more severe recurrence. Researchers examined 116 HCV-infected patients undergoing liver transplantation for end-stage cirrhosis or hepatocellular carcinoma. The researchers recorded 29 variables potentially associated with severe HCV recurrence. Of the 95 patients who had received cadaveric liver transplantation, 17 (18 percent) had severe recurrence. Of the 22 patients who had undergone living donor transplantation, 9 (41 percent) had severe recurrence. [View Article](#)

Hepatitis B Vaccine Linked To Multiple Sclerosis

14 September – BBC News reported that people who are vaccinated against [hepatitis B](#) are at increased risk of [multiple sclerosis](#). Researchers do not know whether the vaccine causes MS in those prone to the disease or speeds up MS in those destined to have it. In the UK, people who are at increased risk of hepatitis B (intravenous drug users, individuals who change sexual partners frequently, health care workers, prisoners and prison staff and those traveling to areas of high prevalence) are advised to be immunized against this virus. "It is also important to stress that 93% of the MS cases in our study had not been vaccinated," Dr. Miguel Hernàn of the Harvard School of Public Health said. Thus, for some, the small risk of MS posed by immunization would be far outweighed by the protection against potentially fatal liver problems, he said. [View Article](#)

Left and Right Ears Not Created Equal as Newborns Process Sound

9 September – EurekAlert reported that scientists have demonstrated that the right-left differences for the auditory processing of sound start at the ear. The auditory regions of the two halves of the brain sort out sound differently. The left side dominates in deciphering speech and other rapidly changing signals, while the right side leads in processing tones and music. The team evaluated more than 3,000 newborns for hearing ability by placing a tiny probe device in the baby's ear to test its hearing. The probe emitted a sound and measured the ear's otoacoustic emission (OAE). They used rapid clicks and then sustained tones. They found that the left ear provides extra amplification for tones like music, while the right ear provides extra amplification for rapid sounds timed like speech. Previous research supports the team's new findings in that children with impairment in the right ear encounter more trouble learning in school than children with [hearing loss](#) in the left ear. [View Article](#)

Major EU Project Shows 'Killer Bacteria' More Common Than Expected

15 September – EurekAlert reported that severe infections with [Group A streptococci](#), sometimes called "flesh-eating killer bacteria," are considerably more common than expected in many countries. In an EU project covering 11 countries, it was calculated that some 1,000 cases would be found over an initial 1½-year period. Fully 5,000 were identified. Group A streptococci (GAS) can sometimes occur in the throat without the carrier noticing anything. In other cases, the bacteria can cause a benign form of strep throat or skin infection. But in some cases, partly depending on the nature of the bacterial strain, a throat or skin infection can lead to serious consequences, with chronic heart and kidney damage. An acute GAS infection of the skin, for instance, can also dig deeper and lead to the muscles' being virtually eaten up by the bacteria. In other cases the bacteria can spread rapidly and the body's fine blood vessels start to leak fluids, which can lead to loss of blood pressure and rapid death, even in a young and previously healthy person. [View Article](#)

Missing Genes May Help Explain Why Plague Bacteria Are So Deadly

9 September – EurekAlert reported that by comparing the genome of the [plague](#) bacillus, *Yersinia pestis*, with the almost-identical DNA sequence of *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis*, researchers have found that several hundred genes that apparently were inactivated as the plague bacterium evolved may be largely responsible for its virulence. The researchers said the "massive gene loss" and DNA rearrangements that occurred as *Y. pestis* evolved "provide a sobering example of how a highly virulent epidemic (pathogen) can suddenly emerge from a less virulent, closely related progenitor." Knowledge of the genetic factors that contribute to the plague bacteria's virulence could aid researchers in developing better ways to detect, prevent, and treat the deadly disease. The disease has long been considered a prime candidate for bioterrorism because of its extreme virulence and its potential to be spread through the air as well as by infected fleas. [View Article](#)

MRI Tops Breast-Screening Test for High-Risk Women

14 September – HealthDayNews reported that magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is more effective than other screening methods for finding [breast cancer](#) in women whose genes leave them susceptible to the disease. Among women with the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genetic mutations, MRI was found to be superior to mammography, ultrasound, or a clinical breast exam in detecting tumors. If a woman at a higher risk of breast cancer due to these mutations has access to breast MRI, she should consider it, said the study's lead author. The caveat is that there is a high incidence of false positives. The women in the study had mammography, MRI, ultrasound, and clinical breast exams and underwent one to three annual screenings. During the study, 22 breast cancers were detected. Of these, 77 percent were detected by MRI, vs. 36 percent by mammography, 33 percent by ultrasound, and 9.1 percent by breast exam. When combined, all four screening methods had a sensitivity of 95 percent, vs. just 45 percent for mammography and clinical exam combined. [View Article](#)

Nightclub Lasers Can Harm Eyes

11 September - Health Day News reported that nightclub [lasers](#) may be a vision hazard. The UK's National Radiological Protection Board said that laser beams are strong enough to cause serious injuries, but often come with inadequate safety information and are used by people with no laser safety experience. Laser equipment is now affordable enough for smaller clubs and discos to be able to install them. The kinds of lasers used in clubs and other entertainment venues are Class 3B or Class 4, which are powerful enough to damage dancers' sight when projected straight at their faces. [View Article](#)

No Link between Childhood Vaccines and Autism: Study

10 September – Drkoop.com reported that a new Canadian study adds weight to recent findings that there's no link between the childhood [vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella](#) (MMR) and [autism](#). Researchers from the Department of Psychiatry at the McGill University Health Center said they studied 5,000 computerized records, finding that children who received the MMR vaccine were at no greater risk of developing autism than children who hadn't been given the shot. [View Article](#)

Part of Brain That Extinguishes Fears Found

15 September – HealthDayNews reported that the areas of the brain involved in learning fears have been known, but new research now identifies the areas involved in extinguishing those fears. Researchers found the area called the amygdala is a key in both learning and unlearning fears. They also found the ventral medial prefrontal cortex is critical for the long-term extinction of fears. To determine the brain areas involved, the subjects' brains were scanned for activity using functional magnetic resonance imaging. The models for how fears are learned and extinguished are being used to develop treatments for [anxiety disorders](#). The findings can be used to help develop treatments for [phobias](#) and [post-traumatic stress disorder](#). [View Article](#)

Prostate Cancer Test Under Fire

12 September – The London Free Press reported that a pioneer of the [PSA](#) prostate cancer test taken by millions of men each year now says the test has virtually no bearing on how much cancer is present. Dr. Thomas Stamey of Stanford University said the test is leading to thousands of needless surgeries to remove tiny cancers that may never have become life-threatening. Prostates are frequently removed in response to higher than normal blood PSA levels. However, Stamey found that elevated PSA levels are almost always signs of a harmless increase in the size of the prostate. "In the

last five years, only two per cent of the prostate cancer removed at Stanford had any relationship to PSA," said Stamey, a professor of urology. However, says Stamey, while the test frequently finds cancer today, it doesn't necessarily mean the need for surgery, radiation, hormonal or other aggressive treatments that can leave a man impotent and incontinent. [View Article](#)

Proteins Show Promise for Mosquito Control

10 September – EurekAlert reported that researchers are working on a new approach to mosquito control: inhibiting their ability to metabolize cholesterol. Cholesterol is an important component of cell membranes in vertebrates and invertebrates. In mosquitoes, it is vital for growth, development and egg production. Unlike humans, mosquitoes cannot synthesize cholesterol. They must obtain it from decomposed plants they eat. Using *Aedes aegypti*, researchers discovered that a sterol-carrying protein, AeSCP-2, is the vehicle that transports cholesterol in mosquito cells. Cholesterol is hydrophobic. In order to transport it in a liquid medium, such as blood or cell fluids, organisms must have a way to shield it from the watery environment through which it moves. That shield is typically a carrier protein, such as SCP-2. The researchers reasoned that if they could block the carrier protein, it would disrupt the uptake of cholesterol by the mosquito. The top five most viable inhibitor compounds were then tested on mosquito larvae, producing promising results--the larvae died. The results were dose-dependent; that is, at higher concentrations, larger numbers of larvae died. Still, the concentrations were very small, in the range of 10 parts per million. So far three of the five compounds tested were not toxic to mouse cells and the other two were only slightly toxic. [View Article](#)

Scientists Discover Benefits of Turmeric in Indian Dishes

10 September – The Hindustan Times reported that spicy food could protect the body against damage that leads to [cancers](#), in particular, [leukemia](#). Curcumin, the compound that gives yellow color to Indian dishes is an anti-oxidant which can protect against environmental chemicals that damage DNA. Scientists now increasingly believe that lower rates of leukemia in Asia may be due to the difference in diet. Turmeric is also said to slow the rate of diseases such as Alzheimer's and to possess anti-inflammatory properties that could help with Crohn's Disease. Turmeric blocks some of the harmful effects of cigarette smoke, protects against chromosome damage and prevents dangerous chemicals forming after eating processed food. [View Article](#)

Town-Gown Program Cuts High-Risk Drinking

10 September – Health Day News reported that a program to reduce high-risk [drinking](#) by college students resulted in a reduction in drinking rates and alcohol-related harms at five U.S. colleges that fully implemented the program. It's meant to encourage collaboration between universities and surrounding communities to change environments around campuses that promote heavy drinking. This includes: promotion of alcohol-free activities; expansion of substance-free residence halls; not selling alcohol-related items in student bookstores; prohibiting the sale of alcohol without a license; and requiring registration for people who purchase kegs of beer. The five colleges that fully implemented AMOD had declines of between 5 and 11 percent in rates of student binge drinking. They also had an 18 percent reduction in alcohol-related problems experienced by students, such as missing classes, getting injured, or getting in trouble with police. [View Article](#)

Focus on Epidemiology

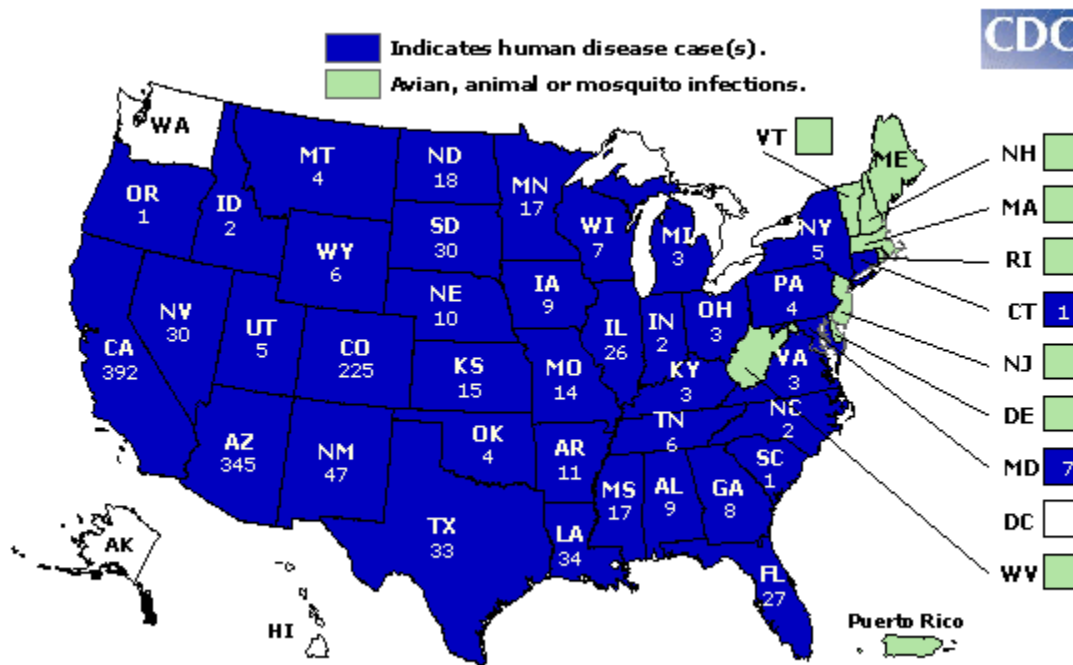
Health Fallout from September 11 Attacks Continues

9 September – HealthDayNews reported that many of the rescue and recovery workers who toiled in the smoke-laden air following the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York City have now developed [respiratory problems](#) and mental health issues. Sixty percent of the workers participating in the study have experienced the onset of lower respiratory problems or the worsening of preexisting lower respiratory problems, while 74 percent have experienced upper respiratory problems. And 51 percent of the workers in the study have qualified for referral to a [mental health](#) professional for evaluation; only 3 percent reported such referrals before the terrorist attack. There has also been a high rate of [musculoskeletal problems](#) reported by the workers since the study started. The researchers said these findings point to the need for longer-term medical monitoring of this group since the potential health fallout from the September 11 attacks could be even more ominous. [View Article](#) [View Full Reports 1](#) and [2](#)

DoD-GEIS: International Congress on Military Medicine

15 September - The [35th International Congress on Military Medicine \(ICMM\)](#) is being held this week in Arlington, VA, with the theme *Humanitarian Assistance for Natural and Man-Made Disasters*. DoD-GEIS-affiliated speakers emphasized partnership with federal/international agencies as crucial to preventing, detecting and containing emerging infections that threaten US and other forces. The GEIS Director reiterated GEIS' interest in promoting an integrated emerging infections surveillance and response framework globally and within DoD through preparedness training, collaboration and coordination among the Services, with CDC and WHO, and involving military expertise in infectious disease, infection control, preventive medicine, veterinary medicine, laboratory, and pathology. The GEIS Civil-Military Liaison Officer at WHO described the unique contributions of militaries in responding to infectious disease outbreaks citing their case management capacity, disease surveillance activities, laboratory/epidemiologic expertise, and unparalleled logistical ability. The GEIS Zoonosis/Vector-Borne Officer discussed DoD assistance to the WHO responding to re-emergence of A/H5N1 avian influenza (AI) in Asia. Enhancing regional surveillance and control for the highly-lethal AI strain (which this year killed 20 of 27 and 9 of 13 confirmed human cases in Vietnam and Thailand, respectively), DoD provided 1) cooperative assistance through WHO to the Laotian government in surveillance and control of H5N1 in humans and poultry, 2) a microbiologist from the US Naval Medical Research Unit 2 (NAMRU-2) in Jakarta, Indonesia to the Pasteur Institute in Vietnam, deployed to strengthen rapid diagnostic capability and 3) surveillance infrastructure for reports used by WHO and generated through the Early Warning Outbreak Recognition System (EWORS), developed by NAMRU-2, to surveil for possible AI human outbreaks in Southeast Asia. An Overseas Laboratory GEIS Coordinator described GEIS-supported infectious disease surveillance activities at the US Naval Medical Research Unit 3 (NAMRU-3) in Cairo, Egypt with emphasis on the need for better understanding of the characteristics and epidemiology of zoonotic infections in local population to better define disease risks to forces during deployments to the CENTCOM region. *Information on many "hot topics" such as Influenza (avian and human), Leishmaniasis and severe respiratory syndromes, including SARS, is available on the [DoD-GEIS website](#); for information on ongoing investigations, see the [DOD-GEIS secure site](#).*

2004 West Nile Virus Activity in the US (as of September 14, 2004)



[Source: CDC Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases](#)

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

Sudan: Thousands of IDPs Dying Every Month - WHO

14 September – IRIN News reported that between 6,000 to 10,000 of an estimated 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the troubled western Sudanese region of Darfur are dying every month. Many of those who die are children aged five and under. A survey done by the WHO and the Sudanese government showed that mortality rates had surpassed the mark that aid agencies use to define a humanitarian crisis - which is one death per 10,000 people per day. The survey found that the IDPs were dying at a rate of 1.5 per 10,000 people each day in North Darfur, and 2.9 per 10,000 in West Darfur. Lee Jong-wook, Director-General of WHO, said, "Thousands, including thousands of children under five, are dying every month from diseases which can be easily prevented and treated. Increased and better focused action is now vital." [View Article](#)

USEUCOM

Anthrax: 10 in Isolation

15 September – News 24.com reported that ten people were admitted to Pretoria's Unitas hospital for observation after coming into contact with a substance feared to be [anthrax](#) at a government department's city centre offices. None of the six men and four women were ill or displayed any symptoms. They were being kept in isolation as a standard precautionary measure, and would probably remain in hospital until the results of forensic tests being conducted on the substance were known. A departmental registry clerk apparently found a dusting of powder on a bursary application received through the mail, and reported it to security. About 20 members of the emergency services hazardous materials team swept the building and confiscated the package. [View Article](#)

Salmonellosis on a Cruise Ship Traveling from Germany around the UK

13 September 2004 – ProMED reported that an outbreak of gastrointestinal disease on board a cruise ship sailing around Britain is currently being investigated. The MV Mona Lisa left Bremerhaven, northern Germany, carrying 940 people (330 crew and 610 passengers). Most of the passengers were German. Following a welcome dinner that day, 86 people developed gastrointestinal illness over the following 4 days. The attack rates among passengers and crew are reported to be similar, although dates of onset among crew members were mostly 1 day later than among passengers. Diarrhea was reported much more often than vomiting. So far, 16 cases have been microbiologically confirmed as [salmonellosis](#). A Scottish outbreak control team is trying to determine whether a food served at the welcome dinner was the source. [View Article](#)

South Africa: Chickens with Bird Flu Culled

9 September – lafrica.com reported that South Africa has widened a slaughter of ostriches following an outbreak of [avian flu](#) in five farms last month and started culling chickens. "This week, we started culling ostriches in two new farms which had a link with the five other affected farms, either sharing workers or exchanging birds with them," agriculture ministry spokesperson Segauti Mahlangu said. "We've also been destroying poultry in the area as chickens are susceptible hosts of the virus," he said. Tests conducted in the first week of August found traces on two farms of the mild strain of avian influenza, H5N2, in the Eastern Cape province. The agriculture ministry has said it is not harmful to humans. [View Article](#)

Zoonotic Diseases - European Scientists Unite To Fight Diseases

9 September – EurekAlert reported that 300 of Europe's top scientists in 16 Institutes/Organisations in 10 European countries have come together to form "Med-Vet-Net". This "Virtual Institute" will create the critical mass of European scientists needed to attack the problems caused by [zoonotic disease](#). Zoonotic diseases, caused by bacteria, viruses and parasites, are naturally transmitted from animals to man and each year cause 14 million deaths worldwide (WHO). Such diseases include salmonella, rabies and cryptosporidia. In addition to the human pain and misery caused by these diseases the cost to the EU is well in excess of €6 billion per year. [View Article](#)

USNORTHCOM

Americans Suspicious Of Terror Plans

14 September – Reuters reported that most Americans would not cooperate as officials expect during a [terror incident](#) such as a smallpox or dirty bomb attack. A survey of 2,545 people found that they do not trust the federal government to take care of them during an attack, and would take many matters into their own hands -- endangering themselves and their families. Only two-fifths of those surveyed would follow instructions to go to a public vaccination site in a smallpox outbreak and only three-fifths would stay in a building other than their home after a dirty bomb explosion. Many of those surveyed feared they could go to a smallpox vaccination site, get exposed to people who already had smallpox, and then be told they could not safely get the vaccine because they were pregnant, had eczema, AIDS or some other condition. People asked to think about a dirty bomb explosion said they would try hard to get to their children or other family members, even if told to stay put by authorities. "Only 59 percent would stay in the building," said the lead researcher. [View Article](#) [View Study](#)

Docs Will Be in Short Supply in US, Analysts Say

15 September – Reuters reported that policymakers and the medical profession need to recognize and take immediate steps to avert a looming shortage of physicians. While the number of medical students has remained relatively constant, the need for physicians is likely to grow in the coming years, as 78 million baby boomers reach the age when their health needs peak. The shortage of doctors may stem from the supply side as well as the demand side. Younger physicians, those under age 36, "are working about 10% fewer hours" than their older colleagues. One potential source of relief is a growing number of physician assistants, nurse practitioners and other non-physician health professionals. [View Article](#)

Fewer Kids Use Ecstasy, LSD, Drug Report Finds

9 September – Reuters reported that 19.5 million Americans aged 12 and older, or 8 percent of that population, currently use illicit [drugs](#). Fewer U.S. teens are using marijuana, Ecstasy or LSD but more are abusing prescription drugs. Among youths aged 12 to 17, 41 percent fewer said they had used Ecstasy in the past month and 54 percent fewer said they had taken LSD. The survey found a 5 percent decline in the number of teens who had ever used marijuana. Marijuana continues to be the most commonly used illegal drug. Misuse of painkillers rose from 13.1 million to 15.7 million. The numbers of binge and heavy drinkers did not change between 2002 and 2003. About 54 million Americans 12 and older admitted to binge drinking, defined as having five or more drinks in a row, in the month before the survey. [View Article](#)

Health Agency May Recommend Flu Vaccinations for All Americans

10 September – Bloomberg reported that U.S. public-health advisers may recommend all Americans receive [flu inoculations](#) each year, expanding the potential market for vaccine makers Chiron Corp. and Sanofi-Aventis SA by almost two-thirds. CDC began discussing a plan to vaccinate all 290 million Americans annually and may make a decision next year. The only other vaccinations recommended for all Americans are for tetanus and diphtheria every 10 years. The expansion may halve the 36,000 annual U.S. deaths from complications of flu and create a mechanism for inoculations against bioterrorist agents and emerging diseases such as SARS. [View Article](#)

Hospitals Asked Not to Burn Medical Waste

14 September – The State Journal-Register Online reported that Gov. Rod Blagojevich said Illinois hospitals that burn [medical waste](#) on-site with incinerators may be putting the public's health at risk. The governor targeted 11 hospitals, including three in the Springfield area, that still have incinerators, saying they pose a threat to neighboring residences with the release of dioxins, mercury and other toxic substances. He wants them to stop voluntarily or face either a ban through legislation or tighter state regulations. Blagojevich's administration wants the hospitals to use alternative, "cleaner" means to dispose of medical waste or contract with a commercial incinerator the state deems safer. Illinois EPA Director Renee Cipriano acknowledged that many of the Illinois hospitals are meeting current emissions standards but said the thresholds don't inspire confidence in some communities or counter emerging scientific data about chemicals released into the air from incineration. [View Article](#)

Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Alert System

9 September – The USGS reports that a new Nonindigenous Aquatic Species (NAS) Alert System to track the spread of invasive species nationwide is available. Now, users can report nonindigenous and invasive aquatic species they sight, automatically receive email alerts, or perform searches on aquatic species -- such as American alligators in Pennsylvania, Asian carp in Colorado, or snakehead fishes in Virginia. The system is flexible, providing two different perspectives -- one to a user interested in an area, the other to users interested in a species. The alert system is tailored to provide wildlife managers the information they request to help them plan and manage the impact of invasives on native species and habitats in their states, parks or conservation areas. View the [NAS Homepage](#)

Number of Flu-Associated Hospitalizations on the Rise, Especially for Elderly

14 September – EurekaAlert reported that the estimated number of [influenza](#)-associated hospitalizations among elderly patients has increased substantially over the past two decades. The researchers analyzed hospitalizations in several different ways and found there were 226,054 primary and 294,128 any listed respiratory and circulatory hospitalizations associated with influenza virus infections on average each season (and annual averages of 94,735 primary and 133,900 any listed pneumonia and influenza hospitalizations associated with the influenza virus infections). Highest rates of influenza-associated primary respiratory and circulatory hospitalizations were found in persons 85 years and older. Persons aged five years through 49 years had the lowest rates of hospitalizations associated with influenza. The authors write: "Currently, we estimate that more than 200,000 respiratory and circulatory hospitalizations are associated with influenza each year in the US, substantially more than estimates of pneumonia and influenza hospitalizations." [View Article](#)

Oregon Posts First Case of West Nile in Human

10 September – The Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported that a Malheur County patient has been diagnosed with [West Nile virus](#), Oregon's first human case. Until yesterday's test results, the only confirmed Oregon cases of West Nile virus had been in birds and horses. Washington is the only state in the contiguous United States without any reported animal or human West Nile infections. [View Article](#)

Postal Service Urged to Hone Plans for Coping with Anthrax

15 September - CIDRAP News reported that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) says the most important lesson gleaned from examining the [anthrax](#) exposures in US Postal Service (USPS) facilities in 2001 is that agencies must err on the side of caution to protect people from uncertain and

potentially life-threatening risks. The agency also suggests that the USPS update its guidelines for responding to anthrax attacks and similar threats. The Postal Service's revised rules from December 2003 still don't address problems that occurred during the anthrax incidents in that they don't define key terms such as what should trigger evacuation of a site; they include outdated, potentially confusing references; and they don't address issues such as what steps to take between initial diagnosis of anthrax in a postal worker and confirmation of the disease by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). GAO investigators concluded that critical information that could have alerted public health agencies and USPS to the risks postal employees faced in 2001 was not quickly available. [View Article](#)

Privacy Rule Builds Biomedical Research Bottleneck

13 September – EurekAlert reported that the Privacy Rule implemented as part of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 is constraining researchers in the United States and slowing the progress of a wide range of clinical studies and biomedical research. Unless fundamental rule changes are addressed, many studies may simply move offshore. In the past, identifying patients who might potentially benefit from a clinical trial of a new drug or treatment was simply a matter of reviewing medical records for suitable candidates and then contacting them to see whether they would be interested in participating. Under HIPAA regulations, however, patient contacts now must be initiated by their physicians – busy people whose understandable priority is the practice of primary or specialty patient care. Scientists who do clinical research involving human subjects – now must spend months compiling registries of patients who have given their doctors permission to share their medical records with researchers or devising other complicated alternatives. [View Article](#)

U.S. Health Insurance Costs Soar, Workers Hit

9 September – Reuters reported that [health insurance](#) premiums rose five times faster than U.S. workers' salaries this year and fewer American workers were covered by employer health plans. Premium increases moderated slightly, rising 11.2 percent this year, compared with a 13.9 percent jump in 2003 but the pace of growth is five times that of both inflation and worker income. The percentage of people receiving health-care coverage at work dropped 1 percentage point to 61 percent in 2004 from a recent peak of 65 percent in 2001, the Kaiser study found. The average annual premium for a family on a preferred provider plan, the most popular managed-care plan, was \$10,217 in 2004, up 10 percent from a year earlier. [View Article](#)

USPACOM

Anti-Viral Bid to Curb Killer Flu Outbreak

12 September - The Sun-Herald reported that anti-viral medication has been urgently dispatched to a private Newcastle nursing home in a bid to curb a fatal outbreak of [influenza](#). The respiratory infection has caused the deaths of at least eight residents in as many days. Three women and a man, aged between 70 and 90, have died from the highly contagious illness during the past 48 hours. The man, who had advanced cancer, and a woman died facility in the suburb of Waratah. Two women with symptoms were taken to the nearby Mater Hospital, where one died and the other was reported to be seriously ill. [View Article](#)

Brain Surgery Patients in CJD Alert

14 September – The Sydney Morning Herald reported that a Melbourne hospital warned more than 1,000 former patients they may have contracted a rare and fatal brain disease from surgical instruments. Although doctors say the risk of transmission is extremely small, the Royal Melbourne Hospital couriered letters to 1056 brain or spinal patients after confirmation of the rare Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) at the hospital. The hospital stressed that the strain, [Sporadic CJD](#), was not the type known as variant CJD (vCJD) and commonly referred to as mad cow disease. Concerns arose after a middle-aged man died earlier this year of CJD, which is one of the only diseases to withstand normal sterilization processes. The man underwent brain surgery at the hospital twice in 2003, but an autopsy only revealed he had the disease last week. The hospital has withdrawn its stock of 15,000 neurosurgical instruments pending their replacement and has begun sterilizing its stock of 300,000 surgical instruments on the advice of the National CJD Incidents Committee. [View Article](#)

Viet Nam: Dengue Fever

12 September - ProMED-mail reported that [dengue fever](#) in Viet Nam, which has eased up since August 2004, killed 73 local people in the first 8 months 2004, a higher number than the total number of deaths caused by the mosquito-borne disease in 2003. The country detected some 1500 new dengue fever patients in each week of August and in early September 2004. Nearly 45,830 local people nationwide were reported to have suffered from dengue fever between January and early September 2004, mostly from southern localities such as the provinces of Soc Trang, Bac Lieu, and Ben Tre, whose weather is most favorable for the development of mosquitoes. [View Article](#)

Bird Flu Outbreak Hits Malaysia, Thailand

14 September - The China Daily reported that Malaysia has detected a new outbreak of [bird flu](#) in a village in north-east Kelantan state, the sixth to be hit by the deadly virus in a month. A 26-year-old man and an eight-year-old girl were admitted to hospital for observation after developing coughs and flu-like symptoms. The H5 strain of avian flu was detected in quail less than 10 kilometers from the first village where the deadly H5N1 bird flu virus, responsible for 28 human deaths in Asia, was discovered last month. Culling of the quail and other poultry in the area would begin immediately, Hawari Hussein, director-general of the Veterinary Department, said in a statement. "No signs of H5 infection have been detected outside the 10-kilometre quarantine zone, nationwide surveillance continues," Hawari said. Officials announced yesterday that the entire Kelantan state was under intensive monitoring after three new outbreaks were announced over the weekend, with more than 200 officers conducting clinical checks at wet markets, bird sanctuaries and pet shops. Thailand on Sunday announced three new suspected bird flu cases in Kabin Buri district, Prachin Buri province. Four patients with symptoms of respiratory infection are suspected infected with bird flu and are being treated at a hospital in Min Buri. The Kabin Buri district, where an 18-year-old man died of bird flu last Monday, was not a controlled area because there were no signs of the H5N1 virus. [View Article](#)

Thailand to Host ASEAN Meeting on Bird Flu

11 September - VOV News reported that Thai Health Minister Sudarat Keyuraphan has announced that the country will host a regional meeting on [avian flu](#) in November to reach a conclusion on vaccination. The meeting will bring together health ministers and officials from the 10 ASEAN-member countries plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea to consolidate the region's position on the use of avian flu vaccines, which was a fiercely contested topic across the region. [View Article](#)

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Barbados: Hurricane Ivan

14 September – The Barbados Advocate reported that there has not been any outbreak of diseases due to water contamination in Grenada as previously rumored. Audrey Mullins, deputy director of Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) said that the over 30 shelters in island have been surveyed and that the local Ministry of Health, PAHO and other health organizations would be the first response agencies to manage any outbreak of disease. While the main hospital was damaged by Hurricane Ivan last week, Mullins said over 300 persons that have been treated for minor bruises or cuts and sent home. In addition, she said, “Persons who are in hospital have to remain there and provisions have been made for them”. Three Grenadian nurses from the British Virgin Island are in Grenada to help to relieve the situation and “PAHO is looking at bringing in some additional nurses, but they are on standby. The issue is that because so many buildings have been destroyed, accommodation is an issue and we do not want to bring them in and are not able to use them,” said Mullins. [View Article](#)

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