

Volume 8 – No. 19

May 8 – 14, 2012

### Health & Travel security Insights from around the five continents

#### North & Central America

##### May 8

**Canada / United States – Dog food salmonella recall expanded:** Diamond Pet Foods has expanded a recall of its dry dog food, taking precautionary steps after several of its brands were linked to an outbreak of a rare strain of salmonella poisoning that infected at least 14 people in nine states. The company said it was now pulling a total of nine brands of its dry dog food from the shelves. The salmonella cases were found in humans who may have had contact with dogs or dog foods prior to their illness. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention is still investigating the outbreak, but said cases could be due to a number of causes, including people touching the dog food and then handling their own food.

**United States – Whooping cough on rise:** The Oak Creek Health Department (WI) is reporting an increase in pertussis cases in Oak Creek, with 22 confirmed and six probable cases so far this year. That's up from just three confirmed cases in all of 2011.

**United States – Cacao snacks recalled:** A San Clemente-based company is recalling packages of organic cacao nib snack food because of possible bacterial contamination, the firm announced. The World Berries brand snack food may be contaminated with a virulent form of e. coli bacteria called O157:H7, which has been known to cause hemolytic uremic syndrome in a small percentage of people. For the vast majority, the bacteria causes a virulent form of diarrhea.

##### May 9

**United States / South Korea – New questions raised about beef safety:** The safety of U.S. beef imports into Korea faces new questions after U.S. authorities confirmed a case of mad cow disease in a dairy cow from a California farm on April 24. The latest discovery was the first in six years and the country's fourth case ever. For Korea, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), more commonly known as mad cow disease, is a high-profile issue affected by political considerations as well as scientific evidence. On May 2, 2008, about two months after Lee Myung-bak was inaugurated president on Feb. 25, anti-government demonstrations kicked off, calling for a ban on U.S. beef imports for fear of mad cow disease. The "mad cow disease" protests were among the biggest political crises President Lee faced in office. Now, with less than a year before the end of its five-year term and the presidential election slated for Dec. 19, the Lee government is faced with the same issue again. However, the latest case of mad cow disease is of a different type than in 2008, and the public response looks much more subdued than four years ago. To begin with, the case detected this time was "atypical," a rare, little-researched form of mad cow disease.

##### May 10

**Canada – Subway smoke bombs:** Unknown assailants set off smoke bombs in three stations of Montreal's subway system. The bombs were thrown at the Lionel-Groulx station at 0745 local time; at the Jean-Talon station at 0804 local time and at the Prefontaine station at 0820 local time. Smoke was also reported at the Fabre and Pie IX stations. The smoke bombs disrupted services during morning rush hour, as authorities evacuated passengers and searched the stations. The shutdown of subway services caused increased traffic on the roads and at bus stations. The majority of the affected subway services resumed at approximately 1000 local time, but congestion persisted for a few additional hours. Footage shot by commuters and eyewitness accounts have led authorities to look for four suspects in their 20s.

### May 10 – Canada – continued:

There has been no claim of responsibility, but it appears that the incidents were connected to the ongoing student protests against plans by Quebec's provincial government to raise university tuition. Montreal's subway has been targeted for vandalism on previous occasions in February 2012.

### May 11

**United States – Whooping cough cases:** Maine public health officials say they have confirmed three cases of whooping cough in Skowhegan schools Superintendent Brent Colbry says a letter was sent home with students Thursday, alerting parents and families about the contagious disease, especially those who have been in close contact with the sick students.

### May 14

**United States – Salmonella outbreak:** Federal officials say the number of people sickened by salmonella after handling tainted dog food has grown by two to 16. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday the two new cases occurred in Canada and Pennsylvania. Earlier cases were confirmed in Alabama, Connecticut, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, New Jersey, Ohio and Virginia. The dog food was made by Meta, Mo.-based Diamond Pet Foods at its plant in Gaston, S.C. That plant also made mold-contaminated food that killed dozens of dogs nationwide in 2005. The company has announced four rounds of recalls over the past month. The dog food was sold under several brand names. Health officials say humans can get salmonella by handling contaminated dog food, then not washing their hands before eating or handling their own food.

**United States – Organic Pastures raw milk recalled:** All raw milk and butter products from Organic Pastures are being recalled after 10 people became sick and state investigators found traces of a bacterial strain in a sample of cream from the dairy. The California Department of Public Health announced Thursday that consumers should throw away any milk, nonfat milk, cream and butter made by Organic Pastures, a dairy in Fresno County. The same dairy was the subject of a raw milk recall late last year, after five California children were sickened by a strain of E. coli. This recall involves the campylobacter bacteria, which typically causes mild illness and symptoms including diarrhea, cramps and fever. Some people can develop serious complications from the disease, however. None of the people involved in the current recall was hospitalized. The patients ranged in age from 9 months to 38 years and came from five California counties, including Santa Clara. They all became sick between January and the end of April this year.

## South America

### May 8

**Colombia – Gun ban:** Authorities have extended a law banning firearms in **Bogota** for three months. The original ban, which had a trial period of 90 days starting February 1 of this year, prohibited any citizen from carrying a gun on the street, in their cars or in any public space. A study by the Ministry of Defense highlights the decline in gun-related criminal activities in recent months. It claims the homicide rate in the city has dropped 17% since the ban went into effect. Prior to the ban, it had been possible for citizens to carry guns if they held a special certificate issued by the 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Army, the military unit which approved the ban. The Bogota District Government is also preparing legislation that would prohibit citizens from carrying knives, as one in every three murders in the city is reportedly knife-related. The extension means the two largest cities have now imposed gun bans, after Medellin enforced a similar measure in January.

**Turks and Caicos Islands – HFMD outbreak:** The Caribbean islands are experiencing an outbreak of the childhood viral disease, hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) according to the Ministry of Health and Education (MOHE). The MOHE reported that there are now 53 cases on the islands including the first cases to be seen on Grand Turk.

### May 8 – Turks and Caicos – continued:

The vast majority of cases, approximately 92 percent, reside in the most populous city, Providenciales. All of the cases reported have been in children under the age of eight. HFMD is typically a benign and self-limiting disease. Most common in young children, it presents as fever, oral lesions and rash on the hands, feet and buttocks. The oral lesions consist of rapidly-ulcerating vesicles on the buccal mucosa, tongue, palate and gums. The rash consists of papulovesicular lesions on the palms, fingers and soles, which generally persist for seven to 10 days, and maculopapular lesions on the buttocks.

### May 9

**Bolivia – Large strike:** Violence occurred in La Paz this afternoon on the first day of a 72-hour strike called by COB, Bolivia's largest union. The confrontations occurred when thousands of protesters attempted to enter Plaza Murillo, where executive and legislative facilities are located. The protesters threw sticks of dynamite, rocks and other objects at anti-riot police officers, who responded with tear gas. The unrest occurred approximately between 1230 and 1450 local time. At least nine people were injured and three were detained. The union is demanding higher salary increases than the 8 percent that the government is willing to grant. Students and health professionals have additional demands specific to their respective sectors. Protests and unrest also occurred in other cities. The most violent incidents occurred in Potosi, where striking workers set off explosions at local government offices. A COB official stated that marches and protests will also occur the next two days.

**Brazil – Strikers clash in Belem:** Clashes occurred between police officers and striking bus drivers in Belem, capital of the northern state of Para. The confrontation occurred outside a labor court building, where approximately 200 drivers had gathered to await the results of negotiations between the union and representatives of the bus companies. Police officers claimed that the drivers attempted to storm the building, while the drivers stated that the confrontation began after a police officer assaulted one of the rally participants. Officers used tear gas against the crowd; there were no reports of injuries or arrests. Approximately half as many buses as usual are operating in Belem due to the strike.

### May 10

**Haiti – Cholera strain might become endemic:** Recent reports by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that the cholera strain in Haiti is evolving and possibly becoming endemic. The May 3 study indicates that the bacterium is changing as survivors acquire at least some immunity to the original bug. Health officials have reportedly been paying close attention to cholera infection rates in Haiti as it heads into the rainy season, when conditions are ripe for the spread of the waterborne disease.

**Peru – Leptospirosis in Loreto:** Flooding has caused an outbreak of leptospirosis in in the Loreto region. After the worst flooding seen in the area for over 20 years, health officials have reported more than 300 cases and 3 deaths associated with leptospirosis thus far in 2012. Health authorities have alerted people to take precautions against the infection, which is spread by animal urine. People become infected with the disease when they come in contact with body fluids of infected animals or in contact with water, soil, or food contaminated with infected urine. Symptoms include high fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, vomiting, jaundice (yellow eyes and skin), red eyes, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and rash.

### May 14

**Colombia – Contamination of the River Bogotá:** The Company of Water Supply System and Sewerage of Bogotá (EAAB) denounced that the contamination of the river Bogotá in the last three years has been the highest of the recent times, which means that the deterioration in the quality of the water has put seriously risk the supply for the city. Carlos Acero, manager of the Master System of the EAAB, commented that has had to to be closed several times the gate of the plant Tibitoc, on account of the growth industrial of the plain.

### May 14 – Colombia – continued:

For example, he clarified that there have been massive and uncontrolled discharges of industries, which means that they were quantities high of fecal coliforms, manganese, nitrogen, and phosphorus, associated mainly to the area between Tocancipá and Villapinzón. Moreover, he pointed out that there has been warned to the CAR of the situation in several hydrologic committees, but that have not intervened. Steel asked up to where they owe they care the water, if the CAR is the environmental authority. The CAR responded saying that the policy of adaptation to climate change presumes that should be done works in order to assume the change, which means that the EAAB should improve the infrastructure of the plants. Accordingly, the magistrate Nelly Villamizar said in an audience in the Superior Tribunal of Bogotá that is thinking about decreeing a precautionary measure in order to oblige to the CAR to do studies that define from where it comes the contamination and if the EAAB should assume the responsibility of treating or impeding those concentrations when there is made the treatment.

**Paraguay – Dengue fever outbreak:** Iván Allende, director of the office of Health Surveillance, explained that since January until Thursday there were recorded 12,600 confirmed cases of the disease, whose virus is transmitted through the mosquito *Aedes aegypti*. He clarified that the blood samples of other 72 deaths for causes attributed to the virus are analyzed in the laboratory of the Ministry of Health in order to confirm or rule out to dengue as responsible for the deaths.

## Europe

### May 9

**United Kingdom – Expo line power outages:** The power was out for about an hour Monday evening in the overhead lines of the newly opened Expo Line, the latest problem to plague the new rail, which is the first into the Westside in 50 years. Until power was restored shortly after 8 p.m., no trains were running between the Crenshaw and La Cienega/Jefferson stations, and delays of up to 30 minutes elsewhere on the line were projected, Rick Jager of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority told City News Service. Under construction since 2006 and in the planning stages for much longer, the new Metro Expo Line opened to paying passengers April 30 after numerous setbacks, including technical problems and escalating costs. Before the much-anticipated opening, train cars on test runs were involved in at least two crashes that in each incident left motorists injured.

### May 11

**Hungary – Anti-austerity protest:** The ultra-right wing Jobbik political party is set to stage a protest march May 12 in Budapest to protest ongoing austerity measures. The route will include the ruling Fidesz and the opposition Socialist party headquarters. The ultra-right parties have been vocal in their rejection of strict austerity measures backed by the EU and the IMF. Although major violence is not expected during the protest action, travel and transportation disruptions in the area of the ongoing march may occur. Jobbik protests can at times draw large crowds, and previous protests have occasionally involved small-scale violence.

**Ireland – Norovirus outbreak:** Visiting restrictions are in place at Waterford Regional Hospital as a result of suspected cases of the vomiting bug, Norovirus. Visitors will only be allowed into the wards in exceptional circumstances. A hospital spokesperson said cancer, emergency and outpatient services would continue as normal and the situation was being kept under review.

**Portugal – Air traffic strike:** Air traffic controllers will stage a partial strike today as part of a series of work stoppages called to protest government austerity measures. Additional stoppages are planned for May 17, 18, 24 and 25 and will be in force between the hours of 0700-0900, 1400-1600 and 2100-2300 local time. Air traffic controllers held five days of strikes over the same issue in April 2012 that resulted in delays and flight cancellations.

### May 11

**Serbia – Belgrade protest:** Tonight, at approximately 7:00 pm there will be a political rally in the form of a vehicle procession through the streets of downtown Belgrade. According to Serbian authorities, 50 vehicles from the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), Dveri, and the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM) have been given permission for this event. However, a considerable number of other supporters may join in this procession. Even rallies intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence. You should avoid the areas of demonstrations if possible, and exercise caution if within the vicinity of any demonstrations.

**Spain – Protests:** Activists affiliated with the "indignant" or 15M movement in Spain are planning to gather in more than 80 cities across the country May 12 to mark the anniversary of street protests that began a year earlier. The largest demonstration is likely to occur in Madrid, where protesters are planning to march from four separate locations -- the Plaza de San Bernardo, Atocha, Cibeles and the Plaza de Oriente -- at 1900 local time and then converge on the central Puerto del Sol. In Barcelona activists are planning to gather at the Plaza Catalunya at 1800 local time and will march down Balmes, Diagonal and Passeig de Gracia before returning to the Plaza Catalunya. There have also been calls for protests in other countries around the world in solidarity with the demonstrations in Spain, but it is unclear how many activists will attend those events.

## Middle East & Asia / Pacific

### May 8

**China - Formaldehyde-tainted cabbage sparks alarm:** Cabbage sellers have been caught spritzing their product with formaldehyde to keep it fresh during long trips to market in the country's latest food safety scandal. China's food industry and regulatory agencies have been scrambling to clean up their reputations following a series of serious problems including melamine-tainted milk and pork laced with a banned growth promoter.

**Singapore – More HFMD cases:** The number of hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) cases continued to rise unabated with last week witnessing a 14 percent spike, even as efforts have been stepped up to curb the current epidemic. Latest statistics from the Health Ministry (MOH) showed that the number of cases rose to 1,590 during the last week of April, breaking the four-year high of 1,394 cases seen in the previous week. Medical professionals spoke to felt that the spike in disease transmission could be due to a lack of vigilance among parents and good personal hygiene habits not being practiced. Dr Kevin Chua of Drs Chua and Partners, said: "Some parents may be eager to send their children back to school before the 10-day quarantine is up as their child appears healthy. But the virus may still be active and this is when transmission can occur." With many households now having both parents working, Dr Chua also noted that parents are also challenged to make last-minute care arrangements when HFMD strikes.

**Vietnam – Killer disease still baffles scientists:** Authorities remain baffled by the mysterious skin disease that has killed nearly 20 people and infected many others in Quang Ngai Province though the Ministry of Health has sent two delegations to investigate. Pham Hong Phuong, director of the Quang Ngai Province Department of Health, said the ministry has concluded it is palm dermatitis with liver problems. But he refused to provide further information about the ministry's conclusion or speculate about it. But Dr Tran Hau Khang, director of the Ha Noi-based Central Dermatology Hospital, who led both delegations, rejected the conclusion. He told the People's Army newspaper that it was based merely on symptoms and the cause remains unknown. Blood tests found the presence of the rickettsia bacterium in 14 out of 26 patients in Ba To District. It is known to cause typhus among other diseases. Vietnam News called the office of the US's Center for Diseases Control in Ha Noi only to be told to seek information from the ministry. But Viet Nam News was unable to reach Minister of Health Nguyen Thi Kim Tien despite repeated efforts. Experts speculate that it is not an infectious disease but is caused by arsenic. The province has reported more than 176 cases since last year. The province is assisting patients' families with VND5 million each. Ba To District has decided to distribute 60 tons of rice to locals in areas hit by a fatal skin disease that has been linked to the consumption of mouldy grain.

### May 9

**Egypt / Israel – Gas issue becoming explosive:** The two weeks since Egypt's abrupt cancellation of a Mubarak-era gas-export deal with Israel have seen an exchange of indirect threats and warnings between the two countries, culminating in an apparent Israeli military build-up on the border of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. "In recent days, Israel appears to have begun preparing for military deployments on its southern border," Tarek Fahmi, head of the Israel desk at the Cairo-based National Centre for Middle East Studies, told IPS. On Apr. 22, Egypt unilaterally cancelled a 2005 export agreement for the sale of natural gas to Israel, which for the past five years had ensured a steady supply of Egyptian gas from the northern Sinai Peninsula to Israel. Egyptian energy officials attributed the move to Israel's failure to meet payment deadlines, stressing that the decision was "not politically motivated." Israel, which is said to depend on Egyptian gas for some 40 percent of its electricity needs, was quick to register its opposition. Several Israeli officials warned of the move's dire implications for the Camp David peace agreement, signed between Egypt and Israel in 1979. Israeli opposition leader Shaul Mofaz called on his country's chief patron, the United States, to intervene on Israel's behalf. The Israeli Finance Ministry went so far as to describe the move as "a dangerous precedent that casts clouds over the peace agreements and the atmosphere of peace between Egypt and Israel." While Israeli officials have vowed to take legal action to ensure the supply of Egyptian gas, local energy analysts say Egypt was well within its legal rights to opt out of the deal. "The Israeli purchasers failed to pay their bills to the tune of some 100 million dollars," Ibrahim Zahran, Egyptian petroleum expert, told IPS. "The contract clearly states that if either party fails to live up to its obligations, the other has the right to terminate the agreement."

**India – Terror alert for Mumbai:** Mumbai authorities issued a terror alert due to the presence of five suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operatives in the city. The militants reportedly entered the city May 6 and are planning attacks on vital installations; the report specifically mentioned naval, petroleum and transportation infrastructure. The LeT terror organization is based in Pakistan and was behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks, as well as high profile incidents in Mumbai and New Delhi in 2011. LeT attacks frequently occur on the 13th and 26th day of the month; at least five major attacks linked to the group have taken place on these dates. Travelers should exercise caution in Mumbai in the short term, particularly on these dates.

**Vietnam – Skin disease kills more victims:** The skin disease of unknown origins in the central province of Quang Ngai has killed two more patients, bringing the total number of fatal cases to 21, the Ministry of Health has said. The victims are Pham Thi Ngot, 61, and Pham Van Nhot, 53, who died after treatment at Ba To District's Health Care Centre and Da Nang City's Hospital early this week.

Both of the victims are residents of Ba To District's Ba Dien Commune where the disease has affected 173 people. The total number of those affected by the disease in the district stands at 183. Yesterday, the Health Ministry, for the third time, sent a delegation to Ba To District to train local healthcare staff on the syndromes of the disease recently named foot and palm dermatitis. Participating at the training session were experts in dermatology, the environment, tropical diseases, labour hygiene, haematology and more than 100 healthcare workers. The participants learned the methods to diagnose the clinical signs and precisely identify the disease. They were also introduced to methodology to carry out field experiments; for instance how to set up questionnaires, how to collect and process data and how to take samples for study.

### May 10

**China – Suicide bomber:** a disgruntled homeowner staged a suicide bombing at a government office in Yunnan province. Reports indicate that at least three people were killed and 14 others were injured when the woman detonated explosives inside a government land bureau office in the city of Zhaotong. Eyewitnesses stated that office staff had asked the woman to sign an agreement for her to leave her house, which had been scheduled for demolition to make way for a development project. Most government offices in central Zhaotong were closed following the bombing as a general precaution. Similar isolated bombings occur occasionally in China, and there have been previous instances in which disgruntled property owners attacked government offices.

### May 10

**India – Pilots' strike:** Pilots from Kingfisher Airlines launched a strike in response to delays in wage payments; adding to the disruptions created by the ongoing Air India pilots' strike. The striking Kingfisher pilots operate out of Delhi's Indra Gandhi International Airport; pilots from Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport were expected to join the labor action. Meanwhile, Air India pilots continued to strike, despite the firings of 16 more pilots and a ruling against the strike by the Delhi High Court. Approximately 300 pilots defied the court's order to return to work, forcing the company to cancel all international flights to Europe and North America through at least May 15.

**India – WHO issues malaria alert to travelers:** The World Health Organization (WHO) has alerted international travelers against the active threat of malaria in India. In its latest 'International Travel and Health Bulletin 2012', the WHO has said that malaria risk exists throughout the year in the whole country at altitudes below 2,000m. The bulletin cautions travelers against malaria infections, especially while travelling to the northeast, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka (with the exception of Bangalore), Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra (with the exception of Mumbai, Nagpur, Nasik and Pune), Odisha and West Bengal (with the exception of Kolkata). According to the global health watchdog, 40%-50 % cases of malaria in India are caused by the deadly P Falciparum, with an estimated 18,000 deaths in a year due to the fatal disease. The WHO bulletin also warns against anti-malarial drug resistance cases being reported in India. The advisory, however, adds that there is no danger of malaria transmission in parts of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Sikkim.

### May 11

**China (Hong Kong) – Public urgent to prevent HFMD contamination:** Hong Kong SAR Government issued the following news release: The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 11) called on people to maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene to prevent hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD). The appeal followed an outbreak of HFMD at a kindergarten-cum-child care center in Yuen Long affecting 20 students aged between 2 and 5. Those affected, comprising 11 boys and nine girls, have developed oral ulcers, fever and vesicles on their hands or feet since April 20. None required hospitalization. All affected children are in stable condition. The stool specimen collected from an affected child tested positive for Coxsackie virus. Staff of the CHP have conducted a site visit and provided health advice to the staff. HFMD is a common disease in children and is usually caused by enteroviruses such as Coxsackie viruses and EV71. To prevent HFMD, members of the public, especially management of institutions, should adopt the following measures: Maintain good air circulation; Wash hands before meals and after going to the toilet, handling diapers or other stool-soiled materials; Keep hands clean and wash hands properly, especially when they are made dirty by respiratory secretions, such as after sneezing; Cover the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and oral discharge properly; Clean children's toys and other objects thoroughly and frequently with diluted household bleach (by adding one part of household bleach containing 5.25 per cent sodium hypochlorite to 49 parts of water), followed by rinsing/wiping with clean water; Children who are ill should be kept out of school until their fever and rash have subsided and all the vesicles have dried and crusted; and Avoid going to overcrowded places.

### May 14

**India – Chikungunya has resurfaced:** Chikungunya is suspected to have resurfaced in Ganjam district with many persons in Boxipalli village exhibiting symptoms of the mosquito-borne viral disease. It will be confirmed after medical tests, doctors said. "Doctors and para-medical staff led by district malaria officer (DLO) went to the affected village on Saturday. They treated patients and collected blood samples for diagnostic tests," said S K Patnaik, chief district medical officer of Ganjam. MLA (Gopalpur) Pradip Panigrahi asked the CDMO to deploy a medical team in the affected village till the disease is controlled.

### Africa

#### May 8

**Sudan – Measles outbreak:** At least 25 children have died from measles during a recent outbreak in Gereida camp in South Darfur. A camp official said there is a high rate of infection spreading amongst children. She appealed to humanitarian organisations, health officials and the World Health Organisation to immediately act to intervene and stop the disease from spreading and risking more lives.

**South Africa – Rabies cases:** At least 97 cases of rabies in cats and dogs have been reported in KwaZulu-Natal since the beginning of the year, the provincial rabies project said. The most affected areas are Ugu district, Port Shepstone, uThungulu, Bergville, and Winterton," rabies project manager Kevin le Roux said.

#### May 10

**Chad – Soldier fires on French forces:** A Chadian soldier opened fire on two French soldiers as they left a military base in N'Djamena, the capital. The soldier reportedly shot at the military vehicle carrying the Frenchmen as he rode by on a motorcycle. One of the French soldiers was reportedly injured. Approximately 950 French soldiers are stationed in Chad; a situation that causes tensions between the French and Chadian governments. Although segments of the public resent the French military presence in the country, such brazen attacks are infrequent.

**Madagascar – Climate leading to malaria increase:** A particularly severe outbreak of malaria in Madagascar has killed seven people since the beginning of the month and has left 60 others in need of hospitalization, the country's health minister said. Madagascar has seen an increase in the number of malaria cases in the first months of 2012 when compared with the previous year, government officials say. Local doctors say the increase is likely a result of changing climate conditions, which have made the region more hospitable to the insects which carry the disease. Moreover, the country suffered a coup in 2009 and Madagascar has been in a political stalemate ever since, despite regional efforts to reach an agreement between the military-backed rulers and the old regime now in exile. The stalemate has caused foreign donors to back away from the country, which is also experiencing an economic decline as a result of the political situation. At the same time, its government is becoming less capable of delivering basic health services. The outbreak has hit the south of the world's fourth largest island, located off southern Africa in the Indian Ocean. Health Minister Johanita Ndahimananjara said there were enough supplies of medicine to care for the ill, but stressed that early detection and treatment were crucial to preventing the disease from causing the patient to die. Malaria, a mosquito-borne parasitic disease that can be fatal, ravages many developing countries.

**Mauritania – Opposition protest:** Several thousand opposition supporters took part in a demonstration march and sit-in in Nouakchott, the capital, late yesterday. The protesters were calling for the resignation of former coup leader and current President Mohammed Ould Abdelaziz. Opposition leaders taking part in the demonstration indicated that further protest actions will take place. There were no reports of violence during the rally; however, a similar action last week resulted in clashes with security forces.

**Namibia – Airport disruption:** Workers at airports throughout Namibia reportedly embarked on a strike to protest restructuring in the Namibia Airports Company (NAC) and financial issues. Hosea Kutako International Airport in the capital Windhoek is among the airports where the strike is occurring. Plan for delays if flying over the weekend.

### A/H5N1 – Avian Flu – Latest update:

**Once-banned avian flu study suggests pandemic threat is real:** Data in a formerly banned study detailing how the H5N1 avian (bird) flu virus can morph -- with the possibility that it could spread from person to person and cause a global pandemic -- may help nations prepare for the impending threat. That's some of the motivation for lifting the ban and publishing the study in the May 2 online issue of *Nature*, experts say. The initial ban applied to two studies slated to be published in two medical journals, *Nature* and *Science*. In December, the U.S. government intervened, requesting that both journals censor some of the data for national security purposes. The concern was that terrorists might use the information to create a lethal biological weapon. The ban was lifted in April, after the U.S. government conducted a risk assessment in March. *Nature* also commissioned an independent assessment. Both showed that publication would confer more public benefit than risk. In the *Nature* study, researchers tweaked the H5N1 virus using genetic material borrowed from H1N1 'swine' flu to see if it would transmit easily between ferrets -- an animal model thought to be closely related to humans. These genetic changes can make the virus easier to transmit, the study found. Knowing their footprints can help researchers know what to look out for and hopefully catch the virus early before it begins to spread. Currently available vaccines and antivirals are effective treatments for this engineered virus. The decision to release the study was also because scientists believe this virus is not likely to be used by terrorists to cause a pandemic.

### Outbreak in birds:

**China (Hong Kong):** A carcass of a crested myna found on April 27 in Hong Kong was confirmed to be H5N1-positive after a series of laboratory tests, the city's Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said here Monday. The dead crested myna, which is a common resident bird in Hong Kong, was found and collected near Santa Monica Avenue, Royal Palms, Yuen Long.

**India:** The Indian veterinary authorities have reported another outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza at a district poultry farm in the state of Tripura, located in North East India.

**Taiwan:** Taiwan has confirmed an avian flu outbreak with virus H5N2 in the district of Yulin, located to some 190 kilometers to the southwest of Taipei, who has caused the death of 4,000 chickens on the last four days. This is the sixth case of influenza A with virus H5N2 registered this year on the island, pointed out the director of the Office of Sanitary Inspections and Quarantine of Plants and Animals, Huang Kuo-ching, in press conference. "The slaughter of the 14,000 remaining chickens of the infected farm has been ordered and it has not entered in the market any other infected chicken", pointed out the director of the Department of Agriculture of Taiwan, Lu Cheng-chang, in the same press conference. The Taiwanese military has been sent in order to carry out a disinfection of the farm and of up to three kilometers all around, in order to avoid the contagion of the more than 13 million chickens that are raised in the farms of Yunlin.

### Human infection:

No human infection has been reported for this week.



### From Around the World

#### Childhood dental problems linked to general health problems later on?

**Australian researchers investigate:** The University of Queensland Children's Nutrition Research Center at the School of Medicine and the School of Dentistry are looking for volunteers aged two, six and ten years for a new study, which aims to establish whether children may be changing their diets to eat unhealthy food because of dental problems and therefore submitting themselves to a higher risk of obesity and chronic disease in later life. The researchers are particularly interested in recruiting children that were born prematurely, given that research has provided evidence that pre-term children are more likely to experience feeding and dental problems compared with children born at full term. Pre-term children also tend to have a higher risk of chronic diseases, like type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease in later life. A recent study on oral health in Australia demonstrated that 17% of adults do not eat certain foods because of dental problems. Researchers are keen to find out if children with dental problems such as decay and teeth misalignment are choosing foods that are easier to chew, how this modified diet is affecting their body composition, and whether these dietary choices raise their risk of chronic disease. Easy-to-chew foods tend to be highly processed, while healthier choices, such as fresh fruit, grains, lean meat, and vegetables are much harder for children with dental problems to manage. If the study demonstrates that dental problems do lead to poor diet and high body fat in children, this could lead to the development of health screening and prevention programs to protect those children at highest risk.

**Canada - Universal flu vaccine:** The end of the seasonal flu shot may be approaching: Researchers at the University of British Columbia say they have found a potential way to develop universal flu vaccines that would protect against many strains of flu virus. The research team found that the 2009 H1N1 vaccine, which protected against the virus known colloquially as the swine flu, triggers antibodies that protect against multiple influenza viruses, including the deadly avian H5N1 strain. "The flu virus has a protein called hemagglutinin, or HA for short. This protein is like a flower with a head and a stem," lead study author John Schrader, a professor in medicine and pathology and laboratory medicine, said in a release. "The flu virus binds to human cells via the head of the HA, much like a socket and plug. Current flu vaccines target the head of the HA to prevent infections, but because the flu virus mutates very quickly, this part of the HA changes rapidly, hence the need for different vaccines every flu season." The research team found that the 2009 H1N1 vaccine induced antibodies that are broadly protective and are capable of fighting different variations of the virus. "This is because, rather than attacking the variable head of the HA, the antibodies attacked the stem of the HA, neutralizing the flu virus," Schrader said. "The stem plays such an integral role in penetrating the cell that it cannot change between different variants of the flu virus." The discovery, published in detail in the journal *Frontiers in Immunology*, could pave the way for the development of universal flu vaccines, the researchers say. Seasonal influenza causes serious illness in three to five million people in the world each year, and kills between 250,000 and 500,000 people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

**Traveling the world? Remember to protect against malaria:** Malaria, a parasitic disease mostly transmitted by mosquitoes, causes fever, chills, pain in the joints, anemia, headache, nausea, sweating, and in some cases convulsions and death. It is a wholly unpleasant, killer disease. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about half the world's population- approximately 3.3 billion people, are at risk of malaria. Annually, over 215 million people contract the disease, of which approximately 1.5 million die. Almost 90 percent of all malaria deaths in 2010 occurred in Africa, where children under five years of age are the most vulnerable. The tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world are the most hazardous from a malaria standpoint. Travelers who journey to those regions are often advised to take precautions to avoid the risk of infection.

### From Around the World

**Malaria risk for travelers – Continued:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers updated information on which regions globally pose a malaria risk. If you visit the CDC website, you will find a section called Traveler's Health that has updated disease information about virtually every country in the world. The CDC provides information on malaria and other diseases, how to prevent many of them and how to recognize various diseases should you become sick. The parasites that cause malaria, called sporozoites, are clever. Over time, they have developed resistance to various anti-malarial agents, rendering formerly effective drugs useless. Quinine from the cinchona tree used to be the most important anti-malarial drug in the world, but now it is ineffective in many areas where the parasites have become resistant. Mefloquine, the most widely prescribed anti-malarial drug, works for now, but it is a single molecule drug that experts fully expect to become ineffective over time. Many of the negative effects caused by mefloquine are similar to the effects of malaria – including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, muscle pain and more. Mefloquine also can cause hallucinations, and thoughts of hurting yourself. So how can you prevent malaria without taking a drug that may harm you? The answer is Artemisia annua, a simple and inexpensive herb that contains four known anti-malarial compounds. WHO recommends artemisinin, one of the compounds in artemisia, as a preventive agent, at a dosage of at least 250 milligrams per day. But WHO also recommends combining a synthetic artemisinin called artemether with the drug Lumefantrine. The reason for combining these two agents is to reduce the likelihood of the malaria parasite becoming resistant to the drug. But this combination, known as Coartem, has many negative effects. By contrast, whole Artemisia herb, with its four naturally-occurring anti-malarial compounds, is very easy on the body, and protects against malaria without giving you harmful thoughts. The best way to take full advantage of the protective properties of Artemisia is to purchase capsules of the whole herb. The companies Nature's Sunshine, NutriCology and Allergy Research Group all sell Artemisia capsules online. Taking two daily during travel and one week after should provide protection. Since the decline of quinine, researchers have scrambled to find a natural, safe anti-malarial drug with broad application. Today Artemisia is being cultivated in large quantities in East Africa, notably Tanzania, where it is being made available to people for a fraction of the cost of anti-malarial pharmaceuticals. If you are traveling to a malaria zone, be sure to bring protection. Malaria is not a disease to play with. At best it is highly uncomfortable; at worst it is fatal. Pack artemisia with you, and protect yourself from this killer disease.

### Our Environment

**United States - Sponges in Palm Beach waters hit by mystery disease:** Red barrel sponges from Delray Ledge north to Breakers Reef are being attacked and killed by a mysterious disease, according to divers with Palm Beach County Reef Rescue. More alarming is the rate at which the disease is killing the sponges. On April 11, Reef Rescue explored the waters and didn't see any signs of ailing sponges. Two weeks later, on April 27, 51 barrel sponges were undergoing pigment loss. By May 6, many of the sponges that were turning yellow from pigment loss were disintegrating. While the problem has been documented from Delray Beach north to Palm Beach, it likely spans south into Broward.

**Destruction of an underwater frozen ground at Arctic Ocean has already begun – scientists:** Results of the first scientific drilling of a permafrost on a shelf of Laptev sea confirm that the underwater frozen ground at Arctic ocean has already started to collapse – its thawing can lead to sharp growth of emissions of methane, strengthening of greenhouse effect and, probably, to catastrophic climate changes, the chairman of Far East branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, academician Valentine Sergienko in Russian-German a seminar on problems of evolution of the environment, opened on Friday in Novosibirsk has declared.

### Our Environment

**Arctic Ocean – Continued:** Six participated in the project on drilling in Laptev sea Russian and three foreign centers of science. Chisel works were conducted from a board of a research vessel "Academician Lavrentev", the total cost of the project has made 30 million roubles. Thus during winter drilling in 2012 in 300 kilometers from coast for the first time in Arctic regions the technology of electromagnetic sounding has been used, and also robots for research of behavior of bubbles of methane in thickness of water were used. According to Sergienko, researchers have found out for the first time multi kilometer furrows on a shallow East Siberian shelf. Probably, at podtaivanii their bottom layer protsarapyvajut the heated up ices. Submersibles have fixed powerful streams of methane starting with these furrows, and on depths to 100 meters multi kilometer fields of these "fountains" that poses serious climatic threat are found out. In the Arctic permafrost in the connected kind a methane considerable quantity contains. Besides, considerable stocks of this gas contain at ocean in the form of gas hydrates. Warming of a climate and frozen ground thawing leads to an exit of methane which is in ten times more powerful hotbed gas, than carbonic acid. In turn, warming liberates new volumes of methane, and process of climatic changes can become irreversible and uncontrollable as the shot from fire-arms - about it says so-called "a hypothesis metangidratnogo guns". Sergienko has informed that scientists have spent hundred thousand measurements of streams of carbonic gas and methane at different levels of a shelf - from a benthonic layer to a surface. The obtained data has shown that concentration of these gases in the seas of east Arctic regions is very non-uniform. Scientists have defined territories with high level of emissions of methane. As its powerful source east shelf which is exposed to coastal and ground erosion (destruction) serves. However "gazit" not all bottom of east shelf but only in zones of the raised tectonic and seismic activity, the academician has noted. The highest concentration of carbonic gas - 500 millimolej on liter, according to Sergienko, has been fixed on collapsing island Maastaha. In the fresh-water rivers methane well is oxidized and any more does not represent the big threat of ecology - it is revealed that the river Lena in a mouth has no raised concentration of methane. "In salty water of ocean such volume of methane would be oxidized some years, and in fresh water this process lasts only four days", - the academician has noted. As he said, about 80 % of an underwater frozen ground containing thousand giga ton of methane hydrates it is located on the East Siberian shelf. At hit even 5 % of these stocks of methane in atmosphere climatic accident is not excluded. Thus the part of these territories concerns zones of high seismicity that raises this risk. "Thus to atmosphere will get 40 giga ton methane, that is in eight times more, than today contains in atmosphere. To predict such scenario, to learn, when it can occur, without special researches while it is difficult", - has noted Sergienko.

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