

Volume 6 – No. 10
February 23 – March 1, 2010

Health & Travel security Insights from around the five continents

North America

February 24

United States – FDA warning: Eli Lilly & Co. has apparently violated good manufacturing procedures in making an ingredient used to produce drugs at a plant in Puerto Rico. The FDA said the drugmaker didn't adequately investigate deviations in manufacturing processes to determine whether some batches of active pharmaceutical ingredients should be released to help make the company's diabetes medicine, Humalog. It's unclear from the letter, which is heavily redacted, what problems the FDA or the company found with the active pharmaceutical ingredient.

United States – FDA warning: The Food and Drug Administration is warning of potential heart risks when combining two anti-HIV drugs. The agency says preliminary data suggest Roche's Invirase and Abbott Laboratories' Norvir can affect the electrical activity of the heart when used together. The FDA says the HIV drug combination can lead to irregular heart rhythms which can cause lightheadedness, fainting, and in some cases death.

United States – Cruise line hit by Norovirus: About 350 people who became sick a week into a Caribbean cruise are responding well to medicine. A Celebrity Cruise spokesperson said 326 of the more than 1,800 passengers on the Celebrity Mercury began complaining February 21 of upset stomachs, vomiting and diarrhea. Twenty-seven of the nearly 850 crew members also reported symptoms.

United States – Statewide protests: Demonstrations will take place on March 1 and 4 against state budget cuts which have affected California's public education system. The University of California Student Association will stage a demonstration March 1 between 11:00 and 13:00 (local time) in the state capital Sacramento. University students and teachers intend to rally March 4 in downtown Los Angeles, assembling at Pershing Square, at the corner of 5th and Hill Streets, at 16.00 and marching to the governor's office, located at 300 Spring Street. Groups in 17 other states – New York, Alabama, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas and Washington – are expected to stage similar protests on March 4.

February 25

United States – TB cases: Two cases of tuberculosis have been reported in Charles Mix county (South Dakota) in 2010. In 2009, there were 18 cases of TB reported in South Dakota, including three in Charles Mix county.

February 26

United States – Pepper recalled: Rhode Island health officials say a New York-based company, Wholesome Spice, has recalled 25-pound boxes of crushed red pepper because of a suspected link to a salmonella outbreak. The recall applies to boxes of pepper sold from April 6 through January 20 in the Northeast U.S., but not directly to consumers.

February 28

Canada – Closing Olympic celebrations: The party continued late into the night throughout downtown Vancouver as Canada's men's hockey team took the Gold medal in a nail-biting gold medal game against the United States. Revelers poured onto Robson St. and other major thoroughfares, where they continued the celebrations until the morning. The event occurred as the closing ceremonies for the Olympic Games occurred in another part of town. Vancouver International Airport is bracing for a major exodus of travelers over the next forty-eight hours.

March 1

United States – Products recall: The Kroger Co. said it is recalling Kroger Onion Soup & Dip Mix and Kroger Beefy Onion Soup & Dip Mix sold in some of its retail stores because the Company has been made aware by a supplier that an ingredient in the product may have been contaminated with salmonella. Stores under the following names are included in this recall: Kroger, Dillons, Fry's, King Soopers, City Market, Smith's, Food 4 Less, Jay C, Scott's, Owen's, Baker's, Gerbes, Hilander and Pay Less. Stores the company operates under the following names are not included in this recall: Ralphs, Fred Meyer, QFC and Foods Co. No illnesses have been reported in connection with the Kroger products.

South America

February 23

Brazil – Dengue fever cases soar: Cases of dengue are soaring in the country, reaching a total of 12,666 with five fatalities since January. The government has declared an epidemic in five different states: Mato Grosso, which borders Bolivia; Mato Grosso do Sul, which borders Bolivia and Paraguay; Acre, which borders Bolivia and Peru; Roraima, which borders Venezuela and Guyana; and Goias, which is in the centre of the country. Epidemic risks have been evident since the beginning of the year.

Brazil – Polluted beaches: Despite the improved quality of 14 beaches in Rio, six beaches, including Cariocas, Ipanema, Arpoador and Red Beach, were still classified as "not recommended" due to the high concentration of coliforms and E. coli, which can cause infections and skin diseases.

February 24

Brazil – Leptospirosis cases: Epidemiological surveillance confirmed two cases of leptospirosis in Sorocaba, 97 kilometers from São Paulo. The patients are residents of the Park Are Benthó, area that was flooded in January. These are the first cases confirmed by contact with flood water in Sorocaba this year.

February 25

Mexico – Travel alert: This week the U.S. Department of State expanded its travel alert for Mexico, adding two Mexican states to the areas it warns U.S. travelers to avoid. The updated alert includes Durango and Coahuila in northern Mexico. The killing of four U.S. citizens in late 2009 and early 2010 in Gomez Palacio, Durango, contributed to the updated alert, the State Department said in a release.

February 25 – Mexico – continued:

Drug trafficking is the primary cause of the rise in violence, the release said. The State Department continued to urge travelers to delay unnecessary travel to Michoacán in central Mexico and Chihuahua.

Haiti – Travel advisory: U.S. Citizens travelling to and from Haiti through the Dominican Republic have reported incidents of violence near the Haitian border on route 44 between Barahona and Jaquimes. Reports indicate that a group of persons attired in paramilitary clothing placed tires in the middle of the road and set them on fire to form a makeshift blockade, forcing passing vehicles to slow down or stop. Armed gunmen fired shots and threw rocks at vehicles that failed to stop for the blockade. Additionally, in at least one incident, men with guns and machetes briefly detained American citizens travelling through the area.

Paraguay – Dengue fever outbreak: Health authorities confirmed of 556 cases of dengue in the country and announced preventive measures to avoid the spread of the disease.

February 27

Chile – Powerful earthquake: More than 50 aftershocks with magnitudes between 5.0 and



6.9 have followed an earthquake measuring 8.8 on the moment magnitude scale that struck at about 03.34 (local time) off the coast of the country, around 65 miles (105km) west-south-west of the city of Talca (Region VII) and 70 miles (115km) north-north-east of Concepción (Region VII). An estimated 500,000 homes have been destroyed and more than 700 people have been killed as a result of the earthquake, with deaths reported in the Santiago metropolitan region (RM) and Regions V, VI, VII, VIII and IX; the death toll is expected to rise as relief operations gain momentum. Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport (SCL) in the capital Santiago (RM) is

expected to be shut for at least the next 24 hours as the authorities assess the damage; several flights are being diverted to Mendoza (Argentina). Additionally, the country's main seaport in the city of Valparaíso, 61 miles (98km) north-west of the capital is closed until the extent of the damage has been assessed. In Santiago, the subway (metro) system will remain closed until at least 1 March; bus services are running intermittently. Severe infrastructural damage, including to buildings, roads and bridges, is being reported in several cities, including Talca, Concepción, Santiago and Maipo (RM); additionally, essential services, including power and telecommunications, have been disrupted in the affected areas. Moreover, large queues have been reported at petrol (gasoline) stations that have opened and there are reports of isolated incidents of looting at destroyed stores in Concepción. The initial earthquake, which occurred at a depth of 21.7 miles (35km), caused a four-foot (1 meter) tsunami wave in Valparaíso city (Region V); large waves have also been reported in coastal areas of Region I. Severe damage has been reported on the Juan Fernandez islands (Region V), where three people have been reported killed and ten other are missing; moreover, an evacuation was ordered on Easter island (Region V). The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center has lifted the tsunami warning that was previously issued for Chile. Significant travel disruption is likely in areas affected by the earthquake, particularly where buildings have collapsed and debris may be blocking roads.

Recommendations:

- Companies and organizations with staff operating in Chile (particularly in the central area of the country between Santiago and Puerto Montt (Region X)) should account for personnel.
- Clients should defer all non-essential travel to affected areas, including Concepción and Santiago. The airports in both cities are currently not operating. SCL in Santiago is expected to reopen in the next 24 hours; it is not yet known when Concepción Airport (CEP) will reopen.

Chile – Earthquake – Recommendations – Continued:

- Travelers on essential business should carefully consider their need to travel to the affected areas of Chile, given the operational difficulties they are likely to encounter. Travelers should liaise closely with local sources prior to making a decision to deploy and travel should only be undertaken with careful planning.
- At this time, it is not necessary to evacuate staff already in Chile; however, personnel in severely affected areas close to the epicenter should consider relocating to other parts of the country, as there will be significant disruption to infrastructure and business in the coming days. Movement should only be undertaken after careful planning and if it is clear that there will be no risks to safety.
- Aftershocks are a normal and expected occurrence. Although they are usually less powerful than the initial earthquake, they can be strong enough to cause further damage to already weakened structures.
- During a blackout, only use a flashlight for emergency lighting. Never use candles, matches or lighters. Turn off electrical equipment that was on when the power went out. If you use a generator, connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator. Do not connect a generator to the electrical system of a home.
- When power is restored, make sure that there are no gas leaks before operating light switches.
- Be alert to the dangers posed by structural damage to buildings and bridges.
- Be aware that routes may be blocked by debris or subject to closure by the authorities with no notice. Travelers should be confident in their driver and vehicle and carry enough fuel to complete their return journey.
- Communications remain difficult. Text messaging (SMS) offers the highest chance of success: email and social networking sites may also be effective.
- Reconfirm your flight as airports may have been affected and might still be closed if damage to the airport buildings, infrastructure or runway has occurred.

Europe

February 23

France – Possible fuel shortages: A strike by members of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union employed by a major oil and gas company entered its second week. More than 80 percent of the company's workers from its six oil refining plants nationwide are participating in the industrial action, in protest at the management's proposal to shut down refining operations at one of its sites. The work stoppage has led to fuel shortages at 119 petrol (gasoline) stations across the country since it began on 16 February, including in the capital Paris, the north-western city of Rennes (Bretagne region) and the southern city of Toulouse (Midi-Pyrénées region).

Spain – Nationwide protest campaign: The General Union of Workers (UGT) and the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) on 23 February will stage demonstrations in several cities, including the capital Madrid, to protest a government proposal to increase the retirement age from 65 to 67 years. Demonstrations occurred in Barcelona, Girona, Lérida and Tarragona (Catalonia region), Valencia, Alicante and Castellón (all three in Valencia region) and Oviedo (Asturias region).

February 24

Czech Republic – Transport strike: Transport unions have announced they will hold a five-hour strike on 1 March, from 04.00 to 09.00 (local time), to call for lower taxes on benefits. The work stoppage is expected to affect rail services nationwide and public transport primarily in the capital Prague. It is not yet clear if Prague Metro employees will be participating in the strike.

February 24

Italy – Big fuel spill: Thousands of tons of diesel and other fuel fouled Italy's longest river, the Po, after pouring into a tributary from storage tanks in what authorities said could have been a deliberate act of pollution. The Lombardy and Emilia Romagna regions in northern Italy asked Rome to declare a state of emergency to help deal with the spill in the Po and its Lambro tributary in the country's richest industrial and agricultural area.

United Kingdom – Norovirus outbreak: An outbreak of norovirus at a major Highland hospital escalated yesterday amid concerns that hospital officials waited five days before warning the public and urging visitors to stay away. The number of wards and units affected at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness has risen from 8 to 10 since Monday, and the number of patients and staff struck down by the virus increased from 61 to 93 last night.

February 25

Italy – Immigrant groups to protest: Immigrant groups across the country will observe a 24-hour strike March 1 to denounce recent violence against immigrant communities that they perceive as having been motivated by racism. The event, which is supported by several political parties, labour unions and civic groups, will entail rallies in several major cities, including a major demonstration at the Villa Ada Park in the capital Rome. Elsewhere, protesters plan to gather at 15.00 (local time) at the Piazza Nettuno in the northern city of Bologna.

Switzerland / Libya – Threats against Swiss nationals: According to media reports, Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi, called publicly for a "jihad" or holy war against Switzerland, referring to the public vote banning the building of minarets in the country. "The masses of Muslims must go to all airports in the Islamic world and prevent any Swiss plane landing, to all harbours and prevent any Swiss ships docking, inspect all shops and markets to stop any Swiss goods being sold," Gaddafi said. It is presently not clear whether this statement will result in any violence or direct threats against Swiss nationals or against companies associated with Switzerland.

February 26

Russia – Rotavirus infection: Rotavirus infection is growing in Tver Region. In January 2010, there were 65 cases rotavirus infections, twice more than in 2009.

United Kingdom – Warning over legal drug: A new drug which can be sold legally for use as a plant food is being used recreationally in Loughborough. Stimulant Mephedrone, also known as M-cat, bubbles and meow, has cropped up as a recreational drug in the town, including incidents at Loughborough University where the Students' Union and police have issued a warning not to use the powder.

February 27

Italy – Anti-Berlusconi rally: Several organizations held a demonstration at Piazza del Popolo in Rome to protest what they claim is a violation of the Italian constitution and to demand resignation of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi over an alleged freedom of speech curtailment. Several thousand people took part in the rally, which occurred peacefully.

February 28

France – Death toll rises: At least 50 people have been killed in storms that have lashed parts of Spain, Portugal and France, officials say. Forty-five of the victims died in France, where many drowned or were hit by parts of buildings or falling trees. Winds of up to 140km/h (87mph) caused chaos as they moved from Portugal up through the Bay of Biscay. The storm system is moving north-eastwards and areas of France bordering Belgium and Germany are on alert for heavy rain and high winds.

February 28 – France – continued:

Worst affected have been the Vendee and Charente-Maritime regions on the western coast of France. The storm system, named Xynthia, has put five of the 95 French departments on red alert - only the second such warning since a new emergency system was introduced in 2001. More than a million homes in France have lost electricity, from the Brittany peninsula in the west to the highlands of the Massif Central in the centre of the country. According to the AFP news agency, the French national power company EDF said half a million customers were still without power at nightfall on Sunday, and Mr Fillon said it would take several days to restore power everywhere.

Turkey – Coup tensions rising: Over the past week over 50 officers, both active and retired, have been arrested throughout Turkey on the orders of the AKP government. The incident occurred just as the government, which is seen as Islamic, has come under increasing pressure for its recent silencing of political opponents and public critics. The military, long considered Turkey's bastion of secularism, has staged four coup d'etats in the past 50 years in Turkey and the latest accusations apparently stem from the second of two separate plots to have been uncovered against the government by members of the military. Protests have already begun and political unrest is certain to continue, regardless of the military's response.

Middle East & Asia / Pacific

February 23

Mongolia – Rabies outbreak: A small administrative unit in southern Mongolia has been quarantined due to an outbreak of rabies among livestock and wild animals, the country's National Emergency Management Agency said. Some 60 people of 15 families, 3,400 head of livestock and 12 dogs are under the quarantine, which will last until the end of the month.

Philippines – Measles cases on the rise: German measles cases in the country have increased to 669 after 99 more patients were admitted in various hospitals around the country. This prompted the Department of Health (DoH) to ask local governments to institutionalize a measles vaccination program to augment vaccination drives by the national government.

February 24

Afghanistan – Situation remains extremely dangerous: At least 7 civilians were killed and 14 others injured when an improvised explosive device (IED) attached to a bicycle detonated at around 10.30 (local time) outside the traffic police headquarters in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province. The attack comes amid Operation Moshtarak, a major offensive by international and Afghan forces aimed at clearing insurgents and drug traffickers from the nearby Taliban strongholds of Marjah and Nad-e Ali. While the offensive has led to the killing and capture of a number of insurgents, many others have been pushed to the outskirts of the districts, which is likely to result in increased insurgent activity in Lashkar Gah as well as other nearby districts such as Nawa and Babaji.

Australia – Toxic algae spreads: An outbreak of toxic algae in the Murray River is spreading rapidly, with the size of the bloom doubling in the space of 48 hours. More than 680 kilometers of the river is on the highest level of alert, after river managers increased warnings. The "red alert" now stretches from Wodonga to Barham, affecting major towns in between such as Yarrawonga, Cobram and Echuca. Under a red alert, people are advised to have no contact with the river or risk gastroenteritis, eye and ear complaints. The same towns were affected for weeks by a massive algal bloom last year, and environmentalists feel outbreaks are becoming too common.

February 24

China – Workers poisoned at iPhone factory: Dozens of people have been hospitalized for poisoning from a cleaning chemical while working for a Taiwan-based iPhone touch-screen supplier - many more people than the company admits. As many as 100 Wintek Corp. workers may have been stricken from the misuse of the screen cleaner n-hexane at a company factory in the Jiangsu Province city of Suzhou.

China – Children continue to suffer from poison milk fallout: China's poisoned milk scandal has put huge numbers of children at risk of long-term health problems, a study revealed. More than one in 10 of the country's youngsters made ill by the milk showed signs of kidney damage six months afterward, researchers found. At least six children died and nearly 300,000 children fell ill two years ago after drinking infant formula bulked out with the industrial chemical melamine. The study's results show that up to 30,000 children could have suffered health complications for months after drinking the contaminated milk. It also shows that the long-term health effects remain little understood, even as China makes plodding progress in cleaning up a food supply strewn with tainted products.

February 26

Armenia – Opposition protest: Armenian opposition groups held a protest rally at Matenadaran manuscript museum, followed by an authorized march through central Yerevan. The rally was held to mark the March 1, 2008 violence that followed protests surrounding the 2008 presidential elections. Ten to fifteen thousand participants attended a similar rally held on March 1, 2009.

Indonesia – Holiday advisory: Bali's airports, seaports, and public roadways will be officially closed in observance of the Hindu holiday of Nyepi from 6 am March 16 until 6 am March 17. All travelers, including U.S. citizens, should expect that it will be impossible to arrive and depart Bali, or travel on the island, during Nyepi. While Nyepi is a nationally observed holiday in Indonesia, transportation will be officially closed only on Bali. Elsewhere in Indonesia it is a bank holiday (not a work day), and transportation and other facilities will be open on a holiday schedule.

Philippines – Warning from red tides: The Department of Health (DOH) warned the public against shellfish products from provinces where red tide algae had started to bloom. Health Secretary Esperanza Cabral said selling and harvesting shellfish from Sorsogon Bay in Sorsogon; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and Misamis Occidental; Bislig Bay in Bislig City, Surigao del Sur and Dumanguillas Bay, Zamboanga del Sur are banned.

Africa

February 23

Chad – Meningitis outbreak reaches epidemic level: Since the beginning of 2010, some 500 cases of meningitis have been recorded in two southern regions of Chad. The disease has claimed at least 50 lives and authorities have warned that the disease has reached epidemic proportions in the two regions.

Côte d'Ivoire – Anti-government protests: At least three people, including a police officer were killed in clashes between the police and opposition demonstrators in the northern Abobo suburb of the city of Abidjan (Lagunes region), as violent anti-government protests continued in several parts of the country. Protesters erected roadblocks, burnt tires and threw stones at vehicles in Abobo, prompting the police to fire into the air and use tear gas to disperse them. Media reports also indicate that protesters set up several roadblocks on the main route between Abidjan and the capital Yamoussoukro. Elsewhere, demonstrators attempted to set on fire a hotel and the house of President Laurent Gbagbo's spokesman, Gervais Coulibaly, in the city of Katiola (Vallée du Bandama region).

February 24

Côte d'Ivoire – New government: Prime Minister Guillaume Soro announced the formation of a new government that would include the main opposition Rally of Houphouëtistes for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) and Ivorian Labour Party (PIT). Furthermore, the composition of a new electoral commission is to be announced on 25 February; the commission will, according to Soro, retain the structure of the now-dissolved, opposition-dominated Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). In addition, the office of Burkinabe president Blaise Compaoré, who is mediating between the government and the opposition, revealed that the first round of presidential elections had been rescheduled for late April-early May. The new government will consist of a 28-member cabinet; the occupants of 17 posts have already been finalised and most are members of President Laurent Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) and Soro's former rebel New Forces. The remaining 11 posts will be taken by the opposition parties. Despite these developments, fresh opposition-led demonstrations remain possible across the country, particularly if the opposition parties are dissatisfied with the final structure of the new electoral commission, which has been a major source of contention between the ruling and opposition parties in recent weeks. Heightened security measures are likely to remain in place across the country, including in the capital Yamoussoukro, Abidjan (Lagunes region), the opposition stronghold of Bouaké (Vallée du Bandama region) and Gagnoa (Fromager region).

DR Congo – Travel risks: At least three people, including one civilian, were killed and five others injured when suspected members of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) attacked a vehicle belonging to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) aid agency in the eastern province of South Kivu.

Ghana – Meningitis outbreak: A strange form of deadly cerebrospinal meningitis (CSM) has killed 17 people and caused the hospitalization of 78 other in the Upper West Region, with the Jirapa District [northwestern Ghana] being the worst hit. In Jirapa alone, the disease, which experts say has gone beyond the epidemic threshold to become an outbreak, has killed eight people out of the 52 reported cases. The situation has overwhelmed health workers in the region and at the national secretariat of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) due to the fact that the bacterium causing the outbreak is a new strain, the W135.

February 25

Madagascar – Chikungunya outbreak: A district in the south-east is battling an outbreak of the mosquito-borne chikungunya or "stooped walk" virus. Chikungunya, which is transmitted by a bite from an infected mosquito, causes high fever, headaches and severe joint pain that can last several weeks. Around 44,000 families in and around Mananjary, a small port town on the Mananjary River, have been affected by the outbreak.

Mozambique – Cholera outbreak: Mozambique's health minister says 36 people have died this year from a cholera outbreak in the northern and central parts of the southern African country. Leonardo Chavane says more than 1,000 people have contracted the highly contagious yet easily preventable infection this year.

February 26

South Africa – Sick Somalis in isolation: Three Somali nationals are being treated in an isolation unit in the Transkei after they fell ill with an unidentified disease, the Eastern Cape health department said. Spokesman Sizwe Kupelo said a fourth Somali had been declared dead on arrival at Mount Ayliff hospital. They had displayed diarrhoea accompanied by dehydration, severe headaches and vomiting. As a precaution, the three survivors had been put into isolation.

South Africa – Measles outbreak: The Western Cape Department of Health has set up isolation wards to deal with a measles outbreak that has affected more than 500 children in the province over the past few months. It has also officially declared a measles outbreak in the province.

March 1

Liberia – Curfew imposed: The authorities imposed a night-time curfew in the north-western town of Voinjama (Lofa county), located 163 miles (262km) north of the capital Monrovia, after at least four people were killed and more than 20 others injured in clashes between Muslims and Christians in the town and in the nearby village of Konia on the previous day. The violence started after the body of a Christian student, who had gone missing a few days earlier, was found near a mosque in Konia; members of the Christian community subsequently went on a rampage and burnt down a mosque in the village. This incident prompted Muslims to retaliate by burning two churches and a Christian mission in Voinjama. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has deployed army and police personnel to the area to assist the Liberia National Police (LNP) in restoring order.

H5N1 - Avian Influenza Updates

Outbreak in birds:

Bhutan: in Rinchending area in Phuentsholing [southwest Bhutan, near Indian border].

Vietnam: Since the beginning of the year, dozens of avian flu outbreaks have been detected in southernmost Ca Mau province despite constant efforts to eradicate the disease. Bird flu-infected communes include Khanh Hung, Tran Hoi, Song Doc, Tran Van Thoi, Tan Phu, Tan Loc Bac and An Xuyen. So far, more than 5,000 head of poultry have been culled.

Human cases:

Vietnam: A 38-year-old woman from the Vietnamese southern province of Tien Giang who had tested positive to H5N1 virus, has died, according to a report on the website of the Ministry of Health. The patient had been taken to the local hospital on Feb. 21 with tiredness, aches and difficulty in breathing.

Special – A/H1N1 - Swine Flu – Updates

WHO scientists decide if flu pandemic has passed peak: The World Health Organization's emergency committee of scientists was due to meet on Tuesday to decide whether the swine flu pandemic has passed its peak. The step would mark the first formal recognition that the worst is over since the UN health agency declared a global pandemic last June and emergency precautions swung into action worldwide. The confidential teleconference headed by Australian infectious diseases expert John Mackenzie followed signs over the past months that the A(H1N1) flu was tailing off in most parts of the world. However, WHO spokesman Gregory Haertl insisted that the trend did not mean the pandemic alert was over yet. The meeting "has three issues on the agenda. The primary one is whether WHO should go to the post-peak phase," he told journalists. "The post peak means basically the transition period where most countries have probably seen the peak of activity, but it doesn't mean that all countries have. We could still see additional waves" locally, Haertl added. The committee's recommendation is due to be made public on Wednesday, after health ministries in the WHO's 193 member states plus the Vatican are directly informed by Director General Margaret Chan. Nearly 16,000 people have died worldwide from the new A(H1N1) strain after it spread into 212 countries and overseas territories since it was uncovered in Mexico and the United States in April 2008, WHO data showed.

A/H1N1 – Swine Flu – Updates - Continued

CDC: According to WHO, the majority of Worldwide 2009 A/H1N1 influenza tests remain sensitive to oseltamivir, a common antiviral medicine. Among 2009 A/H1N1 isolates tested, 248 have been found to be resistant to oseltamivir. Seasonal A/H1N1 viruses continue to be sporadically detected in Asia. Low levels of seasonal influenza A(H3N2) and type B viruses are circulating in parts of Africa and Asia. Influenza B activity continues to increase in China, becoming the predominant virus circulating in the country, accounting for 82 percent of all influenza detections.

Japan - Tamiflu-resistant flu may have spread between patients: Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said it has received reports of suspected human-to-human transmission of a Tamiflu-resistant H1N1 influenza virus. A nine-year-old boy in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, western Japan, and another in Tottori Prefecture, western Japan, was found to be infected. In Japan, 52 cases of infection of the Tamiflu-resistant H1N1 virus have been reported so far. Of them, six cases are thought to be the result of human-to-human transmission. None of the six cases has led to the spread of the virus.



From Around the World

Lifestyle disease risk for Indians: Healthcare professionals face a major health threat from lifestyle diseases, which are affecting the quality of life in affluent and emerging communities. While the whole country is affected, people of Indian origin have "gene pools" that predispose them to the effects of lifestyle diseases. Health problems resulting from lifestyle are increasingly cropping up not only in adults but also children. Research centers and healthcare providers have noted an alarming increase in the incidence of diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure and heart attacks in youngsters of both sexes. A trend of childhood obesity is emerging and children as young as 16 are diagnosed with high cholesterol. Unchecked, these problems could lead to crippling complications by the time children reach adulthood. The cause to Indians' susceptibility to these illnesses is thought to originate from several factors, including a certain genetic constitution that predisposed them and their ancestors to diabetes, hypertension and ischemic heart diseases. However, it must be accepted that Indian ancestors worked far harder than their offspring and burnt up the calories modern Indians do not. Lifestyle choices will become essential for populations in developing countries, such as India, in order for them raise healthy future generations.

India: Molecular debris can predict cardiovascular risks: Molecular "trash" circulating in the blood seems to predict cardiovascular disease and untimely death, say researchers. The discovery comes from the largest study of its kind for cardiovascular disease and is the first to identify specific metabolic profiles associated with coronary artery disease (CAD), heart attacks and death among coronary catheterization patients. The Duke University Medical Centre (DUMC) study analyzed metabolites, molecular debris left over after the body breaks food down into energy sources and building blocks of cells and tissues. Scientists believe metabolites may be useful in diagnosing disease, said Svati Shah, Duke Cardiologist and genetics, who led the study.. Shah and William Kraus, professor of medicine at Duke and the senior study author, wanted to know if they could isolate and identify particular metabolites associated with CAD. "We found two sets, or clusters of metabolites that seemed to differentiate between the two groups," says Shah. Using multiple analytic and statistical methods, they found two factors that were clearly associated with CAD and one factor that predicted greater risk of heart attack or death among such patients, said a DUMC release. "When we added these biomarkers to traditional clinical risk models, we found that they increased the accuracy of projected risk," says Shah. These findings were published online in *Circulation Genetics*.

Our Environment

United Nations warns of e-waste threat in 3rd World: A report compiled by the United Nations has warned of the growing threat posed by discarded electronics such as computers and mobile phones as experts kicked-off a meeting on the issue in Indonesia. The report on the growth of so-called e-waste said sales of electronic products in countries like China and India are set to soar in the next 10 years, with a consequent rise in the volume of sometimes highly-toxic waste, a private news channel reported. The report noted that China already produced more than 2.3 million tons of e-waste a year: second only to the United States and had also become a dumping ground for waste from other countries. Without immediate action to ensure proper collection and disposal of materials, many particularly developing countries "face the specter of hazardous e-waste mountains with serious consequences for the environment and public health", it said. The report "Recycling: from E-Waste to Resources" was released on the Indonesian island of Bali on Monday at the start of a week-long meeting of officials and environmentalists.

Two giant icebergs floating off Antarctica could impact global ocean currents, scientists say: An iceberg about the size of Luxembourg that struck a glacier off Antarctica and dislodged



another massive block of ice could lower the levels of oxygen in the world's oceans, Australian and French scientists stated. The two icebergs are now drifting together about 62 to 93 miles (100 to 150 kilometers) off Antarctica following the collision on Feb. 12 or 13, said Australian Antarctic Division glaciologist Neal Young. "It gave it a pretty big nudge," Young said of the 60-mile (97-kilometer) -long iceberg that collided with the giant floating Mertz Glacier and shaved off a new iceberg. "They are now floating right next to each other." The new iceberg is 48 miles (78 kilometers) long and about 24

miles (39 kilometers) wide and holds roughly the equivalent of a fifth of the world's annual total water usage, Young told. Experts are concerned about the effect of the massive displacement of ice on the ice-free water next to the glacier, which is important for ocean currents. This area of water had been kept clear because of the glacier, said Steve Rintoul, a leading climate expert. With part of the glacier gone, the area could fill with sea ice, which would disrupt the ability for the dense and cold water to sink. This sinking water is what spills into ocean basins and feeds the global ocean currents with oxygen, Rintoul explained. As there are only a few areas in the world where this occurs, a slowing of the process would mean less oxygen supplied into the deep currents that feed the oceans. The icebergs, weighing 860 billion tons and 700 billion tons respectively, are located in water over the Antarctic Continental Shelf, Young said. "We expect them to head west along the Antarctic coastline," he said. Scientists are waiting to see the extent of the icebergs' effects on the surrounding ocean, however Young said it was not likely they would reach as far north as Australia, and noted icebergs are very slow movers.

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