

Volume 6 – No. 11
March 2 – 8, 2010

Health & Travel security Insights from around the five continents

North America

March 2

Canada – Flu-like symptoms: Infection control staff at Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital in Windsor (Ontario) are monitoring a seventh-floor unit after a number of patients experienced a sudden onset of nausea and vomiting. Nine patients have reported the symptoms, which lasted between 24 and 48 hours. The unit is no longer admitting patients and transfers to and from the unit are being curtailed. The hospital said the symptoms are typical of the flu season and that the hospital will continue to monitor and contain the situation.

Canada – C. difficile outbreak: Montreal's Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital (Quebec) is dealing with a Clostridium difficile outbreak that infected hundreds in the past year. According to internal documents, several patients died after more than 300 contracted C. difficile, which causes intense diarrhea, fever and abdominal pain and is regarded as the most dangerous bacterial superbug confronting North American hospitals in the past decade. The hospital wouldn't confirm how many deaths were directly linked to C. difficile, but admitted it has been battling the bacteria for several months.

March 3

United States – Pecan recall: American Pecan has announced that it is recalling 1lb bags of Pecan Pieces, as they have the potential to be contaminated with salmonella bacteria. The company has said that the 1lb bags of pecans were sold to walk-up customers at their Yancey, Texas location, as well as to mail order customers in Texas, New York, and Massachusetts.

United States – FDA warning: Diamond Foods Inc. has received a warning for making unauthorized health claims on its website and on labels for its walnut products, according to a letter from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. A website for the company's California Shelled Walnuts notes the products contain omega-3 fatty acids and says studies show omega-3 can inhibit tumor growth, protect against stroke and help treat depression. The FDA said promoting such health claims causes the walnuts to be drugs because only FDA-approved medicines can make health claims. Therefore, the FDA said, the walnuts "may not be legally marketed with the above claims in the United States without an approved new drug application." The FDA has been warning food and beverage companies that claim on websites or labels that their products can help make someone healthy. Last May, the FDA slapped General Mills Inc. with a warning over claims of lowering cholesterol for its popular Cheerios cereal.

March 4

United States – Fish oil and PCBs: An environmental group filed a lawsuit in San Francisco alleging that because 10 types of fish oil or shark oil supplements contain a toxic industrial compound, PCB, the makers and sellers of fish oil supplements are required to warn consumers under California's Proposition 65, Fish oil has become an increasingly popular supplement because it has high levels of healthy omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D.

March 4 – United States – continued:

More than 100 brands of fish oil are available. The plaintiffs in the lawsuit tested 10 products, all of which had some amount of PCB, they say. They found wide ranges in PCB levels, but because scientists haven't agreed on a safe level of consumption, consumers should be made aware of potentially toxic compounds in their supplements no matter what the amount, said David Roe, attorney for the plaintiffs. The lawsuit names CVS/Pharmacy, General Nutrition Corp. (GNC stores), Now Health Group, Omega Protein, Rite Aid, Solgar, Twinlab and Pharmavite, which produces Nature Made supplements, as defendants. Most people don't eat enough fish to risk serious exposure to PCBs, Roe said, but because people generally take fish oil supplements every day, they can potentially consume harmful levels of the chemical.

United States – Hantavirus infection: A Weld county resident died last month of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome. The disease is carried by deer mice. The disease can infect humans when people inhale dirt and dust contaminated with deer mice urine or feces, or when they come in contact with infected mice in homes, buildings, wood or junk piles. It is the fifth case of hantavirus ever documented in Weld and the second death. The first related death occurred two years ago in southern Weld county.

United States – Oysters recalled: OM Seafood Company is issuing a product recall involving oyster meat and oysters in the shell harvested in Yaquina Bay, Newport, from February 1–24, 2010. This recall has been initiated due to potential norovirus contamination. Yaquina Bay oysters are distributed through the on-site retail store and one wholesale account in Oregon (OM Seafood Restaurant). Yaquina Bay oysters were also distributed to 14 individual restaurants and retail stores located in Minnesota, Indiana, Ohio, Utah, Arizona, Texas, Kansas, and Colorado.

United States – Pentagon attacked: The U.S. Department of Defence building was put on lockdown on 4 March 2010 after a shooting incident at a Metro station connected to the complex. Police officers stated that a lone gunman entered the Pentagon Metrorail station at approximately 1840 local time (2340 UTC) and opened fire on Pentagon police officers. The suspect suffered several gunshot wounds before officers were able to bring him into custody. The assailant was taken to a local hospital where he later died. Two officers were also hit in the exchange of fire and are expected to make a full recovery. The entire Pentagon complex was put on lockdown. The alert was lifted after about an hour, and personnel were allowed to exit the building. Police officials stated that they have not yet determined the suspect's motive, although unconfirmed reports have indicated that the gunman may have harbored resentment toward the U.S. military over what he believed were conspiracies surrounding the 9/11 attacks.

March 5

United States – Food products recalled: Thousands of processed food products - from chilies to hot dogs to dips - contain an ingredient that federal food regulators say was contaminated with salmonella, although so far only a few dozen have been recalled because most were cooked before being sold. Basic Food Flavors of Las Vegas, Nev., sold its hydrolyzed vegetable protein to food manufacturers across the country. But one of the company's customers found salmonella in supplies sent from Basic Food Flavors, and the customer alerted the Food and Drug Administration, which inspected the Las Vegas plant. The inspection uncovered salmonella contamination in the company's processing equipment, leading Basic Flavors to recall all its hydrolyzed vegetable protein made since Sept. 17, 2009. Food makers who used the product often cooked it again, killing the salmonella. And Health officials have yet to identify anyone who has been sickened by the contaminant.

South America

March 2

Argentina – Leptospirosis cases: The Ministry of health of Santa Fe confirmed 32 cases of leptospirosis including six deaths since the beginning of the year.

Chile earthquake update – Travel disruptions: The road network continues to be severely affected following the earthquake, particularly around the city of Concepción (Region VIII), one of the areas worst affected by the earthquake. Unconfirmed sources indicate that only military and law enforcement personnel are currently being allowed to travel into and out the city. Delays are also being reported at Los Libertadores Pass, an important overland route between Santiago and Mendoza (Argentina). Meanwhile, the subway system in the capital has reopened. Bus services are running intermittently; the Tur Bus Agency, a major service provider, is operating three daily services between Santiago and Concepción. Essential services, including power and telecommunications, remain disrupted in affected areas, though power supply to Santiago remains largely unaffected. Meanwhile, the main seaport in the city of the Valparaíso (Region V) remains closed.

Colombia – Public transport strike: An indefinite strike by thousands of bus drivers commenced in the capital Bogotá, causing significant travel disruption. Participating drivers clashed with the police and threw stones at buses that were operating in several areas of the capital, including Bosa, Usme and Suba; more than 20 people were subsequently arrested. The taxi drivers' union in the capital, as well as public transport workers and taxi drivers in the cities of Barranquilla (Atlántico department), Bucaramanga (Santander department), and Cali (Valle del Cauca department) are due to join the industrial action today.

Peru – Heavy rain: Heavy rain and flash floods killed at least 10 people and displaced hundreds in the southern department of Cusco. The authorities have declared a state of emergency in the worst affected districts of Taray, Anta, San Sebastian, San Jerónimo, Lamay and Limatambo. Mudslides caused by heavy rainfall have blocked several roads in the region, including the Cusco-Puno (Puno department) route and the Cusco-Písac road. The water levels in the Queresmayo River near Taray have significantly increased, inundating surrounding areas.

March 3

Chile – Latest updates after the earthquake: According to the authorities, 20 domestic and 20 international flights operated out of Santiago's Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport ([SCL](#)). The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that domestic and international flight operations out of Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport (SCL), located 11 miles (17km) north-west of the capital Santiago (Santiago metropolitan region (RM)), were gradually being restored following the earlier closure of the facility due to the massive earthquake on February 27. National carrier LAN Airlines is expected to start restricted services to and from SCL today; passengers who have been affected by flight cancellations will be given priority. Some international commercial flights have already been landing at SCL; however, they are directed to land first at either Cerro Moreno International Airport (ANF) in Antofagasta (Region II) or Diego Aracena International Airport (IQQ) in the city of Iquique (Region I), where passengers are required to disembark for customs and immigration formalities. The stops last for approximately three hours. Once this is done, passengers re-board the aircraft for the onward journey to SCL, where flights land at an emergency terminal comprised largely of tents. Arriving passengers are then transported by bus to the Las Condes district of the capital.

March 3 – Chile – continued:

Meanwhile, Chilean passengers on international flights are landing in neighbouring countries and are then being transported by bus to Chile. The second phase of flight operations at SCL will begin March 6, when domestic and international flights will be operating throughout the day, with passengers completing customs and immigrations formalities at a temporary facility set up to the west of the current terminal. According to local media reports, LAN Airlines is operating at 15 percent capacity. Carriel Sur International Airport (CCP), which serves the city of Concepción (Region VIII), remains closed. The airport will remain shut for at least one week. The main seaport the city of the Valparaíso (Region V) has partially resumed services.

March 5

Chile – Strong aftershock: The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) indicated that an aftershock measuring 6.6 on the moment magnitude scale struck at 08.47 (local time), approximately 20 miles (35km) north of the city of Concepción (Region VIII). There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Haiti – Malaria risk: Seven emergency responders, three Haitian residents now in the United States and one American traveler are known to have caught malaria recently in Haiti. Malaria is endemic throughout Haiti. Haitians are now living outdoors and relief workers are "at substantial risk for the disease," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

Mexican drug-war alliance: The territorial dispute between the Los Zetas drug cartel and the Gulf-Sinaloa-La Familia cartel alliance has spread from Tamaulipas to neighboring Nuevo Leon state. The Nuevo Leon state government made a public request March 6 for civil society to join together to rescue the state from organized crime. The previous day, Nuevo Leon governor Rodrigo Medina announced that drug cartel violence was likely to escalate in the state capital of Monterrey and in at least 20 rural municipalities. The Sinaloa Federation, La Familia and Gulf Cartel organized crime groups publicly announced an alliance on March 3. The alliance intends to capture Los Zetas cartel territory in the northeastern states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon.

March 8

Mexico – Monterrey police rally: Police in northern Mexico protested hours after three of their colleagues were shot to death in an ambush and a fourth was wounded. Local police in the city of San Nicolas de los Garza, a suburb of the industrial hub of Monterrey, gathered outside police stations and shouted demands at their superiors. Police want better weapons, equipment and life insurance. One of the officers killed in the shootout lacked a bulletproof vest, which only some officers have received. A city spokesperson said officers had agreed to continue working "under protest" while their demands are being met.

Nicaragua – Post-election violence feared: There is an increasing possibility of violence in connection with regional elections that were held today in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS). These elections will determine membership on the regional councils of the RAAN and the RAAS. Protests and demonstrations are likely before and after the elections, particularly at or near municipal buildings.

Europe

March 2

Belgium – Eurostar resumes normal operations: Eurostar and Thalys resumed normal operations of their high-speed train services to and from the capital Brussels. The services were disrupted following a train collision near Brussels on February 15.

Ukraine – Commemorative rally: Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko has called for a rally March 9 in the capital Kiev to commemorate the birthday of Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (1814-61); the event will take place at the Shevchenko monument located in the eponymous park near the city center.

March 4

Finland – Port workers to strike: Port workers belonging to the Finnish Transport Workers' Union (AKT) began a nationwide strike to demand better job guarantees from their employers. The strike was earlier postponed as a result of government intervention. Meanwhile, bus and truck drivers belonging to the same union ended a nationwide transport strike March 3 that was launched the previous day, after agreeing to participate in further negotiations over a wage dispute. The industrial action, which began at 18.00 (local time), resulted in significant disruption to regional bus travel and some bus services in the capital Helsinki.

United Kingdom – Norovirus outbreak: Wards at Morrision Hospital (South Wales) have been hit by a norovirus outbreak for the second time this year. Five of the hospital's six medical wards are now closed to new patient admissions. Eight wards were closed at the end of January.

March 5

Greece – Protests turn violent over austerity plans: Protests turned violent in Athens as demonstrators gathered at the landmark of the Unknown Soldier's Tomb near the Greek Parliament, where officials were holding a vote on legislation to approve an economic austerity plan. More than 7,000 protesters gathered to protest against the economic plan. The demonstrators rioted and threw stones at police officers. Additional violence was reported, when masked youths carried out an attack on riot police at the Council of State while trying to break into the Labor Ministry. Public sector unions held work stoppages in protest of the austerity measures; hospitals ran on only emergency staff, schools were closed and public transportation was disrupted throughout Athens. Air traffic controllers also stopped work from 1000-1400 UTC, affecting more than 60 flights. A large general strike is expected to occur on March 11.

March 8

Turkey – Earthquake strikes: A strong earthquake has struck eastern Turkey, killing at least 38 people, officials have said. The 6.0-magnitude earthquake struck the village of Basyurt-Karakocan in Elazig province at 0432 (0232 GMT). It was followed by several aftershocks. The mayor of the town of Kovancilar said their had been deaths in Basyurt-Karakocan, as well as in the nearby villages of Yukari Kanatli and Kayali. Rescue teams have been deployed amid reports of people trapped under rubble. At least 60 people have been taken to hospital. The earthquake had toppled the minarets of mosques in Basyurt-Karakocan, Yukari Kanatli and Kayali.

United Kingdom – Customs strike: UK Border Agency personnel in the British Public and Commercial Services Union will hold a 48-hour strike March 8-10 to protest stalled negotiations over labor conditions. Striking employees include customs officials, airport security and immigration service workers.

March 8 – United Kingdom – continued:

The Border Agency has announced that it will hire private security to replace striking workers. The effects of the labor action will mainly be felt at international airports in the UK. There will likely be shortages among customs and immigration officials, delaying entry into the UK, particularly for non-UK citizens. The strike will also have moderate delays on commercial customs services. In addition to the Border Agency personnel, thousands of public servants across the UK will go on strike during the same time frame. The labor action could lead to localized service unavailability and small demonstrations, but the impact will likely remain marginal.

Middle East & Asia / Pacific

March 2

China - Contaminated water: About 55,000 people in Shuanggou Township in Xiangfan City, Hubei Province were relying on emergency water supplies after the Tanghe River was contaminated. The township's water supply company immediately halted taking water from the river and started using water from two wells. An expert panel was investigating the cause of the pollution. The 233-km Tanghe River, a branch of the Hanjiang River, runs through Hubei and neighboring Henan provinces.

China – Increased security measures: The capital Beijing will see an influx of political representatives from around the country for the 2010 National People's Congress (NPC) summit, a ten-day event beginning March 5, as well as the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) March 3-13. Around 700,000 security personnel have been deployed to the city to maintain law and order at the event. The large-scale security operation has been dubbed 'Operation Moat', as paramilitary, police and private security personnel will be deployed to form three concentric circles around the perimeter of the city. Numerous checkpoints will be established on the second and fifth ring roads, while the third circle will involve patrolling by paramilitary troops on the eight main highways that lead into the capital. All motorists whose vehicles are not registered in Beijing are required to obtain special permits to enter the city during the relevant period. Any public gathering suspected of having a political motive, especially around Tiananmen Square or government buildings, can be expected to be dispersed swiftly and decisively by the police.

Fiji – Typhoid outbreak: More than 99 people in Fiji are now confirmed with typhoid as the outbreak worsens. Typhoid is transmitted by bacteria, and the health ministry suspects contaminated water to be the source in one area and food in the other areas.

Philippines – Typhoid outbreak: A typhoid outbreak has been declared in four remote sitios (sub-villages) of Barangay (village) Datal Anggas in Alabel town, Sarangani following the death of at least two victims. Twenty-one suspected cases of typhoid have been monitored in sitios Salimama, Ihan, Glamang and Sangkoya. Datal Anggas is the farthest barangay of Alabel and can only be reached via a three-hour trip with a four-wheel drive vehicle.

March 3

Japan – Nuclear plant shut down: Japan's Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) said it plans to shut the 1,100-megawatt No.6 reactor at its Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant in northern Japan to fix a pipeline leak.

Philippines – Measles outbreak: Health services declared a measles outbreak in Barangay Kayang Hilltop after it recorded a spike in the incidence of the disease during the past few weeks. All 21 measles cases in the city were recorded in Kayang Hilltop.

March 3

Sri Lanka – Dengue fever cases: The government said that 8,425 dengue cases had been reported in the first two months of 2010, representing a sharp increase from the 2,227 cases reported in the same period of 2009. Fifty people were killed by the deadly disease in January and February, two times higher than the same period of last year.

Uzbekistan – Check-point with Kyrgyzstan closed: Reports indicate that the Kara-Suu (a town in Kyrgyzstan's Osh province) checkpoint on the border with Uzbekistan has been closed by the authorities. The government stated that the decision to close the border spot was because of lack of use. It remains unclear whether the crossing will be reopened.

March 5

Indonesia – Student protests: Hundreds of students gathered outside the Parliament building in Jakarta to protest the planned visit of U.S. President Barack Obama to the country, which is scheduled for March 20-22. Protests were also reported in Padang, Yogyakarta and Surabaya. According to protest organizers, larger protests will be staged on March 12, ahead of Obama's visit. Obama is extremely popular in Indonesia, making these protests against his visit disconcerting. Recent controversy over the placement of a statue of Obama forced the government to move it to a school; Obama is scheduled to sign the base of the statue during his trip. Security is expected to increase significantly in the capital ahead of his visit.

Malaysia – Dengue fever outbreak: A health ministry official is urging people to take precautions against dengue fever after a rise in deaths from the mosquito-borne virus. Over 30 people have died and more than 8,000 people caught dengue fever in January and February, the peak time for infection after monsoon rains. Last week alone, six people died.

Philippines – Electricity shortage: One-hour rolling brownouts hit areas of Metro Manila and nearby provinces yesterday. The power outages, which, according to Manila Electric Company (Meralco) were due to a 245 megawatt shortfall in electricity supply, began at 1000 local time and ended at 1700 local time. The power shortage is expected to last through June 2010 due to the effects of the weather pattern El Nino. Parts of Mindanao, an area that depends on hydroelectric plants for its power supply, have been experiencing brownouts for the past few weeks.

Singapore – Increased security: Security has been increased across the city-state in response to a reported threat against oil tankers in the Malacca Strait. Security has reportedly been heightened at Changi International Airport and the newly constructed casino resorts and other potentially high-profile targets. The Singapore Shipping Association announced a day earlier that it had received a warning from the navy that an unidentified terrorist group is allegedly planning to attack oil tankers and other ships transiting through the strait.

Thailand – Anti-government rallies: Supporters of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship are planning a demonstration in Phrae on March 9. UDD supporters also might demonstrate at Bangkok Bank branches in Sankampheng and Doi Saket between now and the planned March 12-14 rallies in Nakhon Sawan, Saraburi, Nakhon Ratchasima and Bangkok. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence. Exercise caution if within the vicinity of any demonstrations

Turkey/United States – U.S. may vote on Armenia genocide issue: The Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives voted to request a vote by the full House on House Resolution 252, a non-binding resolution connected with Armenia and the events of 1915. Given the sensitivity in Turkey of the issues dealt with in the resolution, there is the possibility of demonstrations and/or other manifestations in protest of this vote. Be alert to the potential for demonstrations, and avoid large gatherings. Particular caution should be exercised in places known to be frequented by Americans.

March 8

Australia – Tsunami alert review: Tsunami warnings are to be reviewed after thousands of beachgoers ignored alerts following Chile's huge earthquake last week. Lifeguards struggled to clear beaches in Queensland and New South Wales as people either returned to the water or came down to watch the tsunami, which turned out to be uneventful.

Philippines – Army storms terrorist hideout: Government troops have killed at least seven militants from the Abu Sayyaf group in a raid on their hideout on the island of Siasi, near the main island of Jolo in the south of the country. An army commander said they believed the men might be linked to a wanted Malaysian militant - Zulkipli Bin Hir, also known as Marwan. It is not clear whether he was among the dead. He is said to be one of the leaders of a key militant group in the region, Jemaah Islamiah (JI).

North/South Korea – Tensions raised: North Korea's military threatened to use "merciless physical force" in response to annual military drills by the United States and South Korea that begin March 8. The North's military also said it will no longer be bound to the armistice agreement that ended the 1950-53 Korean War. The threats come amid efforts to revive stalled negotiations on ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Such threats have occurred in the past.

Pakistan – Bombing in Lahore: At least 11 people have been killed in a suicide bomb attack in Lahore. More than 60 others were injured when an explosives-laden car targeted a building housing an anti-terrorist wing of the federal investigative agency. The amount of explosives was so large it brought down the two-storey building. Close to the country's border with India, Lahore has been hit several times by militants over the past year. Pakistan's government condemned the attack, blaming "hired killers who want to destabilise Pakistan". The police said that the blast had taken place at a building housing the offices of the Special Investigation Group, an anti-terrorism wing of Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in the Model Town area of Lahore.

Africa

March 2

Nigeria – Kidnapping in Niger Delta: Unidentified gunmen abducted three journalists – one South African national and two locals – in the restive Niger Delta region. Reports are conflicting as to whether the kidnap took place near the city of Warri in Delta, or in Imo state. No group has claimed responsibility for the abduction so far. The kidnap highlights ongoing risks associated with travel to the Niger Delta, where expatriates and business travelers continue to face direct and indirect risks from the activities of militant and criminal groups. Although no group has claimed responsibility for the incident, it could be the work of criminal gangs, which are known to carry out kidnaps, primarily for ransom. However, the main ethnic-Ijaw Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) militant group has in the past perpetrated similar abductions targeting foreign personnel.

March 3

South Africa – FIFA World Cup: The 2010 FIFA World Cup is scheduled to take place between 11 June and 11 July in nine cities, including Durban (KwaZulu-Natal province), Johannesburg and Pretoria (Gauteng province), Polokwane (Limpopo province), Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape Province), Cape Town (Western Cape province), Rustenburg (North West province), Nelspruit (Mpumalanga province) and Bloemfontein (Free State province). Authorities have announced the recruitment of 55,000 additional police officers and the purchase of 669 million rand (\$88million) worth of new equipment such as helicopters, water cannon and body armor to ensure adequate security during the event.

March 3 – South Africa – continued:

Personnel are reminded that the country has a high crime rate, which poses a considerable risk to travelers. Armed robbery, carjacking, murder, rape and mugging are commonly reported in the country; the rates of these crimes are especially high in low-income neighborhoods of major cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, where muggings and robberies also occur on commuter and suburban trains. Criminal elements may view the event and its preceding period as a lucrative opportunity and target visitors whom they perceive as wealthy. In addition to targeting individuals, criminals also attack commercial and retail establishments such as shopping malls and outlets, as well as cash-in-transit vehicles.

Sudan – Ethnic violence: At least 30 people, including seven Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) personnel, were killed and 35 others injured in clashes on 26 February-1 March between the Dinka tribe's Atuout and Ciek clans in Yirol East and Yirol West counties (El Buheyrat (Lakes) state). The violence was prompted by an attempted cattle raid; fierce fighting took place in Pagaru, Pankar and Ahan. Troop reinforcements have been deployed by the government to de-escalate the tensions.

March 4

Angola – Cholera outbreak: Six cases of cholera were reported in the last 48 hours in the municipal hospital of Tombwa, southern Namibe province.

March 5

Madagascar – Situation remains unstable: The president of the ruling High Authority of Transition (HAT) Andry Rajoelina rejected an invitation by the African Union (AU) to participate in talks scheduled for March 8-10, in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), aimed at resolving the current deadlock in the implementation of power-sharing agreements signed in 2009. While the three main opposition groups led by the former presidents Marc Ravalomanana (2002-09), Didier Ratsiraka (1975-93; 1997-2002) and Albert Zafy (1993-96) have agreed to take part in the talks, they boycotted an alternative meeting staged by Rajoelina in the capital Antananarivo on March 4-5, purportedly to outline a roadmap for a return to democracy. Rajoelina's refusal will prolong the political deadlock. This is liable to prompt demonstrations by opposition supporters, particularly under the aegis of the newly formed Madagascar Movement, a coalition of the three former presidents' political groups.

Rwanda – Another bombing attack: Two near-simultaneous grenade attacks occurred in Kigali. The first explosion took place near a taxi park in the Kimironko district, while the other occurred along a road in the Kinamba area near the Gisozi Genocide Memorial Center. The attacks took place within 10 minutes of each other at approximately 1900 local time. Reports indicate that at least one person was killed and 16 others were injured. The attacks came one day after President Paul Kagame sought to reassure residents of the country's safety in the aftermath of a similar incident in the capital two weeks earlier. Authorities initially blamed Interahamwe militia members for the February 19 attacks, but later shifted blame to a former army chief, who has since fled to South Africa. The recent spate of attacks comes ahead of Rwanda's August 2010 presidential election, which will be the country's second poll since the 1994 genocide.

H5N1 - Avian Influenza Updates

Outbreak in birds:

Vietnam: Avian flu has appeared in two communes of Vietnam's central province of Khanh Hoa. Local authorities have taken prevention measures including the destruction of 9,300 poultry infected with H5N1 influenza. Other measures have been also implemented such as sterilizing the affected areas and their neighborhood and containing movements of traffic in these places to curb the disease from spreading. Currently, Vietnam reports five provinces nationwide hit by avian flu including three southern provinces: Ca Mau, Soc Trang and Khanh Hoa, and two Northern provinces of Nam Dinh and Dien Bien.

Human cases:

Egypt: The Ministry of Health has announced five new cases of human H5N1 avian influenza infection in separate locations, including two each in Qaliobia and Kafr El-Sheik governorates

Special – A/H1N1 - Swine Flu – Updates

WHO sticks with current pandemic phase: The World Health Organization's (WHO's) emergency committee of experts recommended holding at the current pandemic alert level based on evidence of new community spread of the virus in West Africa and the possibility of a second wave of illnesses as the Southern Hemisphere enters its winter months.

Mexico: The Health Secretariat has confirmed a genetic mutation of the A (H1N1) virus which is resistant to the antiviral oseltamivir (Tamiflu) vaccine.



From Around the World

Hormone changes during menopause “raise heart disease risk”

scientists say: Hormone changes during menopause increase the risk of heart disease in women. "Many women younger than 50 have not yet gone through menopause and still have high levels of the female hormone estrogen in their blood, which is thought to help protect the heart," says Vera Rigolin, associate director of the Center for Women's Cardiovascular Health in the Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute of Northwestern Memorial Hospital. "After menopause, however, the levels of estrogen in a woman's body drop significantly and can contribute to the higher risks of cardiovascular disease," Vera Rigolin adds. Weight gain is also a factor that may play a role in postmenopausal risk of heart disease. Maintaining a healthy weight often becomes difficult after your body experiences a change in hormone levels. Extra mass can take a toll on the body causing physical inactivity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol, all risk factors that can lead to heart attack and stroke. Rigolin says that women, especially those who are menopausal, can reduce the risk of heart disease by adopting a healthy lifestyle. "If you are a smoker, quit immediately and avoid second hand smoke. Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and exercise at least three times per week to maintain a healthy body weight," says Rigolin. Rigolin also recommends visiting the health care provider at least once per year to have your blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol levels checked.

From Around the World

United States – New cardiac CT technology cuts patient radiation exposure drastically: An imaging exam of the heart using the latest generation of CT technology exposes patients to as much as 91 percent less radiation than standard helical CT scanning, researchers have found. "Coronary CT angiography has generated great enthusiasm in recent years, due to its diagnostic accuracy in assessing patients with known or suspected coronary artery disease," said Andrew J. Einstein, assistant professor of clinical medicine in radiology and director of cardiac CT research at Columbia University Medical Center. "However, that enthusiasm has been tempered by concern about the potentially high radiation dose received by patients," he added. In CT, numerous x-ray beams and a set of x-ray detectors rotate around the patient, measuring the amount of radiation being absorbed in the body. At the same time, the exam table moves through the scanner allowing the x-ray beam to follow a helical or spiral path. Many coronary CT angiography exams are conducted on 64-detector row CT scanners, which can image four centimeters at a time. The latest generation of CT technology, a 320-detector row volume CT scanner, can image 16 centimeters or the entire length of the heart in a single rotation and within a single heartbeat. In his study, Dr. Einstein and a team of researchers compared the radiation exposure incurred during a coronary CT angiography procedure using a 64-detector row helical scanning and volume scanning, using a 320-detector row volume CT scanner. Phantoms simulating the male and female body were imaged using six different scan modes.

Our Environment

Growing debate over GM foods in China: Since 2000, genetically-modified potatoes, papayas and soybean oil have all adorned the shelves of this city's supermarkets. But most of the shoppers reaching for them have had little or no idea they were consuming genetically-modified (GM) foods. Unlike in India, where BT Brinjal has ignited stormy debate, the spread of GM foods in China has taken place away from the gaze of the public. But now, as China mulls giving the green light to GM rice, there is growing public concern about how the safety and choice of consumers may be affected. In November, the Chinese Government granted safety certificates for the domestic production of two varieties of GM rice and one variety of GM maize. The government hopes disease-resistant crops will help address growing food shortages, with China increasingly relying on food imports to feed its 1.3 billion population. Chinese scientists say GM rice and maize are as safe as non-GM varieties, and would expand production. GM maize and soybean are already widely consumed in China, as they are in the United States. However, production here is not entirely dependent on private biotechnology companies, such as Monsanto, as is the case in the U.S. — and part of the reason for the opposition to Bt brinjal in India. The ruling Communist Party's Central Committee last month listed expanding the production of GM foods as one of its policy priorities for the coming year. In 2008, the government sanctioned \$3 billion to develop home-grown GM products. But a first-of-its-kind survey on public perception has found rising concern among the Chinese with GM rice. More than 84 per cent of 50,000 Chinese surveyed by the official People's Daily newspaper said "they would not risk their health" by buying GM foods. Under the Ministry of Agriculture's guidelines, all products containing GM ingredients should be labeled when sold. But in practice, this is rarely the case in China.

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