

Volume 6 – No. 3
January 12 - 18, 2010

Health & Travel security Insights from around the five continents

North America

January 12

Canada – Delay at Chalk River reactor: Canadian doctors are concerned any further delay in getting the Chalk River reactor up-and-running will have serious consequences for the country's hospitals. The nuclear reactor was scheduled to reopen earlier but eventually delayed until this spring after 10 months off-line due to a pinprick-sized radioactive water leak. But so far, only 24 per cent of the work has been completed. According to Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd, despite the slow pace, everything is going according to plan and the reactor will be back up by March.

United States – Highly explosive chemical spill: Nine containers of highly explosive material spilled at a major port, forcing the North Carolina facility's closure and evacuation orders for nearby Morehead City. The accident happened around 4:45 am (0945 GMT) when a forklift punctured containers of the explosive during off-loading. Explosives experts from a local Marine base – as well as police, fire brigades and the Coast Guard – rushed to deal with the spilled chemical, known as pentaerythritol tetranitrate or PETN, the same material that was used in the botched Christmas Day bombing of a Northwest airliner en route from Amsterdam to Detroit. The section of Highway 70 is still closed and the voluntary evacuation of downtown remains in place. However, there were no injuries and no damage to the environment.

January 13

Canada – Increased security: Authorities directed airlines and airports across the country to exercise increased vigilance and strictly adhere to all aviation security requirements; the move follows the receipt of intelligence warnings after the December 25 attempted terrorist attack in Detroit. While no specific threat has been identified, reports suggest that a group of 20 Yemen-trained terrorists may attempt to enter the U.S. via Canada. On December 28, Transport Canada and Canadian Air Transport Security Authority announced passengers will only be allowed to carry a limited number of items into the passenger cabin, including small purses, cameras, coats, items for care of infants, laptop computers, diplomatic or consular bags, crutches, canes, walkers, containers carrying life-sustaining items, medication or medical devices and musical instruments. However, passengers travelling within the country may continue to carry two pieces of cabin baggage. CATSA also authorised Royal Canadian Mounted Police and local police officers to assist in security screening at major airports, in order to reduce waiting times.

January 14

Canada – Boil-water advisory: Heavy rains have washed cow manure into the Antwerp Springs water system that feeds Lavington and parts of Coldstream in the North Okanagan (British Columbia). Residents are being ordered to boil consumable water for at least 1 minute.

United States – FDA warning: Federal drug regulators have slapped San Diego's Amylin Pharmaceuticals with a warning letter over allegedly improper promotion of its diabetes drug Byetta. The Food and Drug Administration alleges that Amylin and its partner Eli Lilly & Co. exaggerated the drug's benefits during conversations at a medical conference. The letter also says representatives of the companies suggested it could be used as a stand-alone treatment, not in combination with other drugs, though at the time the FDA hadn't approved that.

January 14 – United States – continued:

The letter stems from a "monitoring and surveillance" program the FDA runs to encourage compliance with limits it sets on marketing of drugs when it approves them. In this case, the FDA says representatives of the companies made misleading or incorrect statements to an FDA representative who attended the June annual meeting of the Endocrine Society in Washington.

United States – Major sewage spill: Between 160,000 and 180,000 gallons of partially treated sewage was released into the Pacific at Oceano Beach (California) this morning. The release occurred after the chlorination system at the South San Luis Obispo County sewage treatment plant failed. Chlorination systems are used to decontaminate effluent before it is discharged. County environmental health officials have posted warning signs at access points along Oceano's beach area. Warning signs will stay in place until testing shows the water meets state safety standards. This is the second sewage spill in the county in as many days. On Tuesday, 100 gallons of sewage spilled into Stenner Creek in San Luis Obispo due to a blocked sewage line.

United States – Nestle revamps cookie dough: Nestle USA will begin using heat-treated flour in its Toll House refrigerated cookie dough, months after the company temporarily pulled the product off store shelves after the Food and Drug Administration found evidence of E. coli contamination. The unit of Nestle SA said it will halt production at its Danville, Virginia, plant until Jan. 25 in order convert the plant to use heat-treated flour. In June, Nestle recalled the cookie dough after the FDA said it was investigating possible E. coli related illnesses that might have been related to the eating of raw cookie dough. On Monday, two samples of cookie dough tested positive for E. coli, Nestle said. The contaminated product was discovered before it was shipped and dough on store shelves is not affected, it added.

United States – Air travel security measures: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented heightened air travel security measures in response to a "continued threat" that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is planning more attacks against the aviation sector. The new measures include random checks of passengers and their bags using explosives-detection devices at U.S. airports; passengers may be screened in airport areas outside of security checkpoints. More air marshals will also be assigned on certain unidentified international routes. There were earlier reports that DHS would further restrict passenger movements during flights, though no additional information regarding this measure is available. U.S. officials have not released any further details about the purported AQAP threat that prompted the latest security measures.

United States – Products recalled: Parkers Farm, Inc. is recalling all of its products because they have the potential to be contaminated with listeria monocytogenes, an organism which can cause serious and sometimes fatal infection in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. No illnesses have been reported to date in connection with these products, which include cheeses, peanut butter, salsa. They are distributed nationwide at Hy-Vee, Cub, Rainbow, Byerlys Lunds, Target, Whole Foods, Jewel, Dominicks, Marsh, Price Chopper, Shop Rite, Nash Finch, Sams Club, Costco, and Safeway.

January 18

Canada – Antacid products recalled: The makers of Tylenol expanded an existing recall of tainted products, adding more than two dozen over-the-counter medications that could have a mildew-like odor and make people sick. Rolaid's Antacid tablets - in bottles of 100 and 150 - are the only products in Canada affected by the voluntary recall, initiated by manufacturers McNeil Consumer Healthcare, a division of Johnson & Johnson Inc. Anyone who is using the antacids should stop immediately and contact McNeil's Canadian branch. The uncharacteristic odors have been linked back to certain wood pallets used in the transportation and storage of packaging in materials used in the affected product. In the U.S., J&J ordered a Tylenol recall, among other over the counter drugs, after consumers have fallen sick using the medication and complained of a moldy smell. The company has recalled many other over-the-counter drugs like Motrin IB, Benadryl allergy tablets and St Joseph's aspirin.

January 18

United States – Nuclear gauge missing: A nuclear density gauge missing from a Pennsylvania plant could release harmful levels of radiation if mishandled, authorities said. The device, which contains a radioactive label, disappeared from a storage locker at Jeff Zell Consultants Inc. in Coraopolis. The firm has offered a \$1,000 reward for the return of the device, which is used at construction sites. The Humboldt, Model 5001 EZ122, with the serial number 5375, is about the size of a shoe box, and has electronic controls and a metal extension rod.

South America

January 12

Haiti – Quake measuring 7.0 rocks Port of Prince: A quake measuring 7.0 on the moment magnitude scale rocked the impoverished Caribbean nation of Haiti causing panic as it struck, officials and AFP witnesses said. A tsunami alert was immediately issued for the Caribbean region after the earthquake struck at 2153 GMT. An AFP correspondent said the ground shook for more than a minute. The US Geological Survey said the powerful quake was initially measured at 7.3 on the scale and struck 16 kilometers (ten miles) from the capital Port-Au-Prince, and 27 kilometers (17 miles) from Petionville. An AFP correspondent in Petionville said one three-story building was toppled, and a tractor was already at the scene trying to dig out victims as people fled onto the streets in panic. The up-scale area is home to many foreign diplomats and members of a major United Nations mission to the country. The temblor struck at a depth of 10 kilometers (6.2 miles), the USGS said. A tsunami warning was in place for Haiti, Cuba, the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic, with the first waves predicted to hit Haiti shortly. Already the poorest nation in the Americas, Haiti has been hit by a series of disasters recently and was battered by hurricanes in 2008. The country was also gripped by a tense political standoff in April 2008 amid riots over skyrocketing food prices. Seventy percent of Haiti's population lives on less than two dollars per day and half of its 8.5 million people are unemployed. According to official figures, food insecurity already affects more than a quarter of Haiti's population, some 1.9 million people, with women and children the worst affected. The Food and Agriculture Organization has designated Haiti as one of the world's most economically vulnerable countries. The WFP serves one meal a day to more than 500,000 Haitian schoolchildren, providing them with what is often their only meal of the day. The organization also feeds 100,000 women who are pregnant or breastfeeding and 50,000 children under the age of five. Since mid-2004, the Brazilian-led MINUSTAH has been keeping the peace in the impoverished Caribbean island nation. (Refer to our special edition – Volume 6 – No. 2 dated January 15, 2010).

Peru – Severe flooding: Authorities declared a 60-day emergency in the districts of Ate, Comas, Rímac, San Juan de Lurigancho, San Juan de Miraflores, Villa María del Triunfo, Villa El Salvador and Lurigancho in the capital Lima following heavy rainfall that brought flooding and mudslides. The declaration was reportedly made to facilitate the provision of federal aid to the affected areas, as well as to expedite rescue and relief operations.

January 14

Brazil – Dengue fever cases: The number of cases of dengue in Mato Grosso increased almost 20 percent in the first week of the year. In 25 cities in the state, dengue is at epidemic proportions, while 18 cities are at high risk of an epidemic. Mato Grosso recorded 1,346 cases of dengue in the first week of January 2010.

January 14

Venezuela – Nationwide power cuts: Daily four-hour-long power outages were implemented across the country, including in the capital Caracas, in an attempt to manage an ongoing electricity shortage. The rolling electricity cuts are expected to last five months. Hospitals, trains and airports are exempted from the measure. However, President Hugo Chávez announced that Caracas would no longer be affected, stating that the power cuts in the city had been implemented at the wrong times and without those affected being informed beforehand. The blackouts on January 13 had reportedly disrupted the operations of several shops in the capital's central Candelaria area – prompting some to remain closed – and temporarily disabled traffic lights in parts of the city. The measures highlight continued uncertainty over the reliability of power supplies in the country, and it is currently unclear when or if power cuts will be reintroduced in Caracas. While major businesses and business-class hotels are likely to have back-up generators, travel in areas affected by power cuts may be hindered as outages can cause traffic lights to malfunction.

January 18

Chile – Presidential elections: Conservative Sebastian Pinera became the first democratically elected right-wing president of Chile in 52 years after winning a run-off election today against the ruling party candidate Eduardo Frei.

Europe

January 12

United Kingdom – Nuclear waste shipment to Japan: Environmentalists are opposing the shipment of highly radioactive waste from Britain to Japan, claiming that it is "potentially dangerous" and "wholly unnecessary." Activists are concerned that if there is an accident there could be significant environmental damage and the toxic cargo could also be hijacked by terrorists. In the next few days, a ship is due to leave Barrow, northwest England, bound for Japan, carrying 28 stainless steel containers of waste – the byproduct of recycling spent nuclear fuel for Japanese utility companies at the Sellafield plant. This is the first repatriation of foreign waste from Britain, and it is thought that this process of returning Japanese waste could go on for another 10 years as there are an estimated 850 containers involved in the process. The first voyage is scheduled to be completed by the end of March.

January 13

Hungary – Transport workers strike: Thousands of commuters were adversely affected as employees of the Budapest Transport Company (BKV) and the state-owned inter-city bus operator Volánbusz began an indefinite strike in the capital Budapest from 00.01 (local time). Most buses and tram services were significantly affected by the industrial action; however, the city's subway and trolleybuses were reported to be running normally. Meanwhile, employees of the Hungarian State Railways have threatened to stage a work stoppage in solidarity with the BKV workers' action. In a separate development, ground staff employed by the national carrier Malév Hungarian Airlines commenced indefinite industrial action January 11 to protest collective bargaining agreements. Airline officials have warned that the strike may cause flight delays at Budapest's Ferihegy International Airport; however, none have been reported so far.

January 14

Europe – Weather related disruptions: Severe weather conditions continued to impede air, rail and road travel in several western European countries, including the UK, Ireland, France and Switzerland. In the UK, some 300 flights were cancelled to and from London's Heathrow Airport, while Gatwick was closed for the majority of the day as workers cleared snow at the airport. Several flights were cancelled at Birmingham International Airport, while flight operations at Cardiff Airport were suspended until 11.00 (local time) due to poor weather. Heavy snowfall also delayed rail services in London and caused the cancellation of at least six Cross-Channel Eurostar trains. Melting snow in southern Ireland damaged power lines and caused power outages in several areas, prompting authorities to place the city of Cork on a flood alert. Meteorologists have forecast further heavy rainfall over the next few days, particularly in the western and southern regions of the country. In France, significant disruption to flights services were reported yesterday at Paris' Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports due to icy conditions. The disruption was exacerbated by a 48-hour industrial strike by air traffic controllers' unions that began on the same day. Road travel through the city, which was disrupted early in the day due to heavy snowfall and icy conditions, had returned to normal by the evening. In addition, adverse weather in Switzerland led to delay of at least 30 flights at Geneva International Airport.

Germany – Blue Wings falls: The low-cost German carrier Blue Wings suspended its operations for an indefinite period due to financial difficulties. Although no exact numbers are available, hundreds of passengers booked on Blue Wings flights may be stranded. This could potentially increase demand for flights with airlines serving similar routes, including between Düsseldorf International Airport (DUS) and airports in Marrakesh (Morocco), Monastir (Tunisia), Karaganda (Kazakhstan), Beirut (Lebanon), Madeira (Portugal), Moscow (Russia), Kiev (Ukraine), Gran Canarias and Palma de Mallorca (Spain), as well as various airports in Germany.

January 15

Bulgaria – Border crossing with Greece: Farmers are due to stage protests and blockades at all three Greek border crossings January 15-19. The transport ministry has reportedly asked its Greek counterpart to seek assurances from the farmers that the free movement of traffic at the Kulata-Promahon, Kapitan Petko Voivoda-Ormenion and Iliendon-Eksohi checkpoints will be permitted. Local media reports claim that the government has threatened to take unspecified action against Greece in the European Union if Bulgarian traffic is disrupted.

January 18

France – Public sector employees to strike: Civil servants affiliated with several trade unions, including the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) and the Fédération syndicale Unitaire (FSU), plan to stage a 24-hour strike on January 21 to protest economic reforms. At least 38 demonstrations are scheduled to take place across the country, including Paris, Toulouse and Lille. Additionally, the FSU has announced a demonstration on January 30 in Paris to protest against reforms in the education sector.

Middle East & Asia / Pacific

January 12

Cambodia – Cholera outbreak: Health officials warned of a potential cholera outbreak after a cluster of infections, including one fatality, were reported in Phnom Penh's Russey Keo district. Health officials have been tracking a rash of cholera infections across the country over the past 45 days.

January 12

China – Commercial gas limit: Beijing's municipal government has brought in an emergency security plan that attempts to ensure gas supply to households in the snow-storm struck city. The measure limits gas heating at 13 degree Celsius in 3,900 large-scale shopping malls, supermarkets, public buildings, office buildings and industrial enterprises, hoping to save gas for residential use. Hotels and restaurants are also the targets of gas limitation in extreme weather. The government also limits the gas heating temperature in hotels and hospitals, setting them at not higher than 20 degrees Celsius. Beijing Municipal Committee indicated Beijing may launch the first-tier gas heating emergency plan if the extreme weather continues. Electricity supplies are unaffected, at present, but low temperatures have marked a new record of 13.12 million kilowatts of electricity consumption in Beijing.

India – New polio cases: A month after the state of Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was conferred the prestigious Polio Eradication Champion Award, it has come to light that out of total 79 cases of P1 type of polio virus in India, nearly half have been reported from Bihar. According to a report quoting the World Health Organization, 38 cases exist in Bihar, followed by Uttar Pradesh (34 cases), New Delhi (3), Punjab (2), Jharkhand (1) and Rajasthan (1).

Pakistan – Violence continues: The police recovered three bodies from the Aram Bagh and Rancho Line areas of the south-eastern city of Karachi, the capital of Sindh province, increasing the death toll in recent violence in the city to more than 40. The three deceased were reportedly members of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP). On the previous day, at least eleven people were shot dead in different parts of Karachi, including Lyari, Malir Town, Rancho Line Bazaar (market), Aram Bagh, Surjani Town and Eid Gah, while a police officer was killed and another injured in an attack by unidentified gunmen in the Pak Colony area. At least 50 people have so far been arrested on charges related to the violence. The provincial government has decided to grant additional powers to security forces to maintain order, including the authority to arrest and carry out search operations without a warrant.

Philippines – Increased security: At least 100,000 additional police and armed forces were deployed at 3,500 checkpoints nationwide at 00.00 (local time) as the electoral period for the May 10 presidential, legislative and local polls formally started. In addition, a resolution issued by the Commission on Elections (COMLEC) banning unauthorized firearms came into force, as the authorities feared possible incidents of politically motivated violence; the ban will be in place until June 9. About 90 checkpoints were to be set up in various parts of Metro Manila.

January 13

Australia – Leaking oil rig: A leaking oil rig off the Northern Territory coast has finally been plugged almost five months after it first started leaking. But the controversy over the leaking rig appears far from over, with an oil safety watchdog claiming the spill could have been prevented if the Northern Territory Government had better monitored offshore wells. Environmentalists believe up to 150,000 barrels of oil may have spilled from the Montara oil rig into the Timor Sea since August 21 last year. Efforts to plug the leak were hampered by a fire that broke out on the rig and a tropical cyclone last month that forced workers to be evacuated.

China – Less travel ahead of Spring Festival: China's Ministry of Health advised children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups to stay put for the upcoming Spring Festival in a bid to prevent an A/H1N1 outbreak. Usually a large number of people, mostly migrant workers and students, travel back home for family reunions during the Lunar New Year, which falls on February 14, resulting in a high peak of mass transportation. The Chinese mainland reported 51 deaths from the A/H1N1 influenza in the week from Jan. 4 to Jan. 10, with 2,173 new cases confirmed.

India – Outbreak may be caused by Ross River virus: The "mysterious fever" being reported from different parts of Tamil Nadu, including the capital Chennai, could be Ross River fever, caused by a virus of that name hitherto confined to Australia, scientists suspect.

January 13 – India – continued:

While the Chennai Corporation has sent details of clinical symptoms to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for confirmation, orders were placed for diagnostic kits with Australian manufacturers. Several people in Chennai, Tiruvallur, Dharmapuri, Madurai, Theni, Tirunelveli and some coastal areas have taken ill in recent weeks with symptoms of chikungunya, including high fever and joint pain, but many of them tested negative for it. Scientists now say it could be Ross River fever. The virus, spread by the aedes mosquito, may have been brought by infected people who arrived from Australia.

January 14

Sri Lanka – Election related unrests: The police used tear gas to disperse several thousand rival political supporters after they clashed at a bus stand in the city of Polonnaruwa (North Central province), around 105 miles (170km) north-east of the capital Colombo. At least four people, including two journalists, were injured and several vehicles damaged during the unrest between activists of the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and supporters of the joint opposition presidential candidate Gen Sarath Fonseka. The incident occurred after UPFA supporters allegedly destroyed several election offices of Fonseka. Election-related violence and political protests are expected to increase as the January 26 presidential election nears; associated canvassing, rallies and campaigning activities will also entail a risk of clashes between political opponents. Tight security measures are likely to be in place ahead of and during the election, especially in Colombo and other urban areas, particularly around sensitive locations such as party offices. Political confrontations usually remain localized and are unlikely to degenerate into widespread unrest.

Vietnam – Airline safety slammed: Top managers at Vietnamese budget airline Jetstar Pacific, part-owned by Australia's Qantas, violated maintenance regulations. The Civil Aviation Administration of Vietnam (CAAV) ruled the three officials made mistakes in monitoring maintenance work and had not fulfilled the company's commitment to safety.

January 18

India – Anti-government protests: Sugarcane farmers will demonstrate in Bangalore, the state capital of Karnataka, to demand the introduction of fixed prices for sugarcane. The rally is expected to take place outside the Vidhana Soudha (state legislature building) in the city's Sampangirama Nagar area. On the same day, the Karnataka State Government Employee's Federation (KSGEF) will hold a demonstration on the city's Dr B R Ambedkar Veedhi Road to voice its numerous demands. In addition, agricultural workers have threatened to hold protests on January 21 and block National Highway-4 (NH-4), which connects the state's Davangere district to Bangalore, unless the local authorities withdraw plans to acquire farmland in Davangere.

Malaysia – Increased security in Sabah: The authorities increased security in the eastern areas of Sabah state (northern Borneo island) after the U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur warned that terrorist and criminal groups may stage attacks on foreigners in the region. The warning identifies as particularly vulnerable resorts located in isolated areas of the state, including the town of Semporna (Tawau division) and the islands of Mabul and Sipadan, off Sabah's eastern coast. The island resorts off eastern Sabah are popular tourist destinations, particularly for water sports enthusiasts and divers. Despite considerable anti-Western sentiment among some sections of the population and the involvement of a number of Malaysian nationals with local and transnational Islamist extremist groups, there have been no terrorist attacks on Western targets in Malaysia.

New Zealand – Norovirus outbreak: A suspected outbreak of the highly contagious norovirus has hit a second North Island hospital. More than 20 patients are being isolated at the Whangarei hospital after a suspected outbreak of the virus, which causes vomiting and diarrhea. One ward had been sealed off and tests were being carried out to confirm the presence of the norovirus.

Africa

January 12

Algeria – Workers' strike: Around 5,000 people employed by the state-owned National Company of Industrial Vehicles (SNVI) continued a week-long strike amid a heavy police presence in the industrial district of Rouiba, located 13 miles (21km) east of the capital Algiers (Algiers province); workers from other companies in the same area have joined the agitation. Roads between Rouiba and the neighboring municipality of Réghaïa were closed to traffic, and heightened security measures remain in place. Security in the district is likely to remain tight, as workers may stage further demonstrations near company offices or outside government buildings if their demands remain unaddressed. Although incidents of social unrest are relatively rare in Algiers, with demonstrations banned under the country's emergency laws, protests occasionally break out in the capital and can result in bouts of localized violence usually targeted at local officials or the security forces. The perceived inefficiency of the local government and the perceived heavy-handedness of the security forces in previous instances of unrest have been known to galvanize demonstrators and increase the likelihood of confrontations erupting at rallies.

Ivory Coast – Yellow fever outbreak: The World Health Organization (WHO) said that in November 2009, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Cote d'Ivoire reported a yellow fever outbreak of 10 suspected cases and 6 deaths in Minignan and Madinani health districts, Denguele region, in the north-western part of the country near the Guinea and Mali borders. Two further cases were reported from Madinani district. In total, five suspected cases tested positive for yellow fever. After an outbreak investigation, the Ministry of Health vaccinated 32,700 people in Banakoro, Kaniaso, Sanaferedougou, Minignan and Samantiguila. In December an emergency mass vaccination campaign targeting a population of 154,941 people was carried out in Minignan and Madinani health districts. Vaccines have been provided from the global emergency vaccine stockpile. An investigation carried out in Guinea at the border with Cote d'Ivoire confirmed a case of yellow fever, which will trigger an outbreak response for the affected area in Guinea.

Togo – Large-scale protests: Thousands of anti-government activists marched peacefully through the streets of the capital Lomé calling for the upcoming presidential elections to be held in two phases rather than one. The demonstration culminated in a rally led by the main opposition party, Union of Forces for Change (UFC), and was attended by supporters of the UFC as well as those affiliated to the second largest opposition party, Action Committee for Renewal (CAR). Presidential elections are scheduled to be held on February 28.

January 13

Ivory Coast – Pre-election violence: Security forces clashed with opposition youths protesting what they maintain is the ruling party's stronghold on the national media ahead of a long-delayed presidential election due to be held in early 2010. At least 14 people were injured when security forces used batons and tear gas to disperse the demonstration outside of the national television (RTI) offices in Abidjan, the economic capital. Opposition figures have alleged that RTI and other national media outlets have marginalized opposition presidential candidates by not granting equal media coverage. Presidential elections have been delayed repeatedly since 2005. Social and political tensions have risen ahead of the election – now scheduled for late February or early March 2010 – increasing the risk for a return to violence and widespread unrest in the country.

Somalia – Civil war continues: Fighting in central Somalia has killed at least 138 people and displaced 63,000 others in the last two weeks. Hizbul Islam and its rival, al Shabaab, both want to impose a strict version of Islamic sharia law in the Horn of Africa nation that has had no functional central government since 1991. Their fighters and those of government-allied Ahlu Sunna Waljamaca have been involved in clashes for control of three towns, causing thousands to flee.

January 13 – Somalia – continued:

Ahlu Sunna, which is aligned to President Sheikh Shari Ahmed's weak U.N.-backed administration, advocates a more moderate version of Islam. It fought with Hizbul Islam insurgents in Baladwayne. Hizbul Islam also clashed with al Shabaab in Dhobley, a town near the border with Kenya. Since the start of 2007, violence has killed at least 19,000 Somalis and displaced 1.5 million people.

Uganda – New security at Entebbe airport: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) announced that security would be tightened at Entebbe International Airport (EBB), which is located 20 miles (30km) northeast of and serves the capital Kampala. The new security measures ordered by the CAA include the use of sniffer dogs and the introduction of body scanners, metal detectors and thorough body checks by security staff. In addition, the police will also deploy officers from a specialized unit at all border checkpoints.

January 18

Botswana – Measles outbreak: The measles outbreak reported in October 2009, is still ongoing. The Ministry of Health has since confirmed more than 150 cases. Suspected and confirmed cases of measles have been reported from almost all districts. The most affected group is youth between 10 and 20 years old. Signs and symptoms of measles include high grade fever, headache, cough, reddish discoloration of the eyes, general body weakness and a skin rash that usually starts on the face. Measles is an infectious disease and isolation is required to prevent further spreading.

Guinea – Transition back to civilian rule: Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara agreed not to return to Guinea to resume power, remaining in Burkina Faso to continue his recovery after last month's assassination attempt. Camara has also agreed to allow interim junta chief Gen. Sekouba Konate to go ahead with plans to transition the country back to civilian rule. The move comes after Konate threatened to resign his position amid a dispute with other junta officials who were demanding that Camara be allowed to return. Konate is expected to choose the prime minister to lead the country ahead of general and presidential elections that will transition the government back to democratic rule. Tensions remain high, and social and political stability issues continue to affect security conditions. There also remain concerns regarding the military's internal cohesion, which could pose a serious problem for Konate as he attempts to guide the nation toward a transitional government.

Nigeria – Religious strife: Violence broke out in Jos in the central Plateau state erupted when Christians protested the construction of a mosque in the Christian-dominated Nassarawa Gwom area of the city. Angry youths reportedly set fire to several houses, mosques and churches. The preliminary death toll is at least 12, but probably higher, with 300 people injured and up to 5,000 residents displaced. Officials have instituted a dusk-to-dawn curfew in the district and army troops and riot police officers are patrolling the city.

Tunisia – Dangerous cosmetics: The National Agency of Sanitary Environmental Control (ANCSEP) has announced the discovery of a highly toxic cosmetic product. The Asian Kohl Eye pencil contains a large quantity of lead and several carcinogenic chemicals. It has a number of different brand names.

Avian Influenza

Outbreaks in birds:

India: Less than just three months of being declared free of the avian flu, the dreaded disease has been detected in the Khargram block of Murshidabad district of West Bengal.

Special – A/H1N1 - Swine Flu – Updates

The World Health Organization (WHO) - Some immunity building up against pandemic flu:

WHO indicated that countries in the southern hemisphere affected by A/H1N1 last year are now broadly protected against new infections. The latest assessment of the virus is indicating that the worst of this year's northern hemisphere flu season may be over for most countries, with sickness levels declining in much of Europe and North America.

Women in early pregnancy should not receive H1N1 vaccine: As the number of pregnant women suffering problems after receiving influenza A (H1N1) shots has increased, Taiwan Association of Obstetrics and Gynecology Chairman Tsai Hong-te suggested that women in their first trimester of pregnancy should not be vaccinated. Women in subsequent trimesters should take the advice of their doctors when deciding whether to get vaccinated, Tsai said. Tsai, who is also director of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Changhua Christian Hospital, said that as it is the first time Taiwan has produced the H1N1 vaccine, pregnant women should be clearly advised of the possibility of negative reactions before they receive the shots. Pregnant women constitute a high-risk group that is vulnerable to H1N1 infection. Figures show that 10 percent of all H1N1 patients in the United States and 9.6 percent of all cases in China were pregnant women, Department of Health (DOH) officials said early this month. According to a weekly monitoring report released by the Central Epidemic Command Center a day earlier, there have been 16 cases of "suspected adverse events" among local pregnant women following H1N1 vaccinations, although initial investigations show that all the cases were unrelated to the vaccine.

A/H1N1 Pandemic – Reported cases as of January 12, 2010:

Several countries have reported increased number of confirmed cases including deaths thereby bringing the total confirmed cases reported in the media:

- **218** countries worldwide are reporting
- **1,478,414** confirmed cases, including
- **15,221** deaths



From Around the World

Cadmium in children's costume jewelry: Because of a ban on using lead in children's jewelry bound for the U.S, some Chinese manufacturers have turned to an even more toxic substance. An Associated Press investigation has found that the dangerous heavy metal cadmium is being used in "fake" or costume jewelry sold throughout the U.S. Lab testing was done on 103 items purchased in New York, Ohio, Texas and California. All but one were bought in November or December 2009. The results are worrisome: 12 percent of the pieces of jewelry contained at least 10 percent cadmium. One of the tested items was 91 percent cadmium by weight. Others showed 89 percent, 86 percent and 84 percent cadmium by weight. The study noted that high amounts of cadmium also were detected in "The Princess and The Frog" movie-themed pendants. In some items, cadmium was easily shed from the jewelry.

From Around the World

Cadmium in children toys – Continued: A piece of jewelry or toy or any other item that is flaking off pieces of cadmium could be toxic if consumed. As well, children do put jewelry in their mouth and cadmium is toxic enough for poisoning to occur from repeated sucking. On the CDC's priority list of 275 most hazardous substances in the environment, cadmium ranks number 7. Examples of some of the issues associated with cadmium poisoning were seen decades ago in Japan, where environmental exposure to cadmium was the result of people consuming rice that was grown in cadmium contaminated irrigation water. The phenomenon was known as itai-itai disease. "Itai" means "ouch" in Japanese.

Quality and Safety of Infant Formulas: The United States Pharmacopeial Convention issued the following news release: New standards to help ensure the quality and enhance the safety of key ingredients widely used in infant formulas and a variety of functional foods are being proposed for inclusion in the Food Chemicals Codex (FCC), an internationally recognized compendium of quality standards for food ingredients. The proposed standards are for three nucleotides, present in breast milk and commonly added to infant formula, and two docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) oils, essential omega 3 fatty acids present in fish and often added to both infant formula and a host of functional foods. The proposed standards are now available for public review and comment by industry and consumer representatives. The standards will be incorporated into a future edition of the FCC, published by the U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention (USP), following a three-month period in which the scientific nonprofit organization will accept public comments on the proposals and consider any suggested modifications. FCC standards are voluntary industry standards that help ensure an ingredient's quality for consumers as well as for food manufacturers who purchase the ingredient for use in their products. Specifically, these quality standards are used to assess the identity, purity and impurities of an ingredient--allowing purchasers to feel confident that it is reasonably free of harmful contaminants, is consistent from one batch to the next and is, in essence, what it claims to be, i.e, it has not been diluted with water or otherwise tampered with through the addition or substitution of other, less-expensive ingredients.

Our Environment

Toxic algae presents big threat: With a new theory surfacing that toxic algae rather than asteroids killed the dinosaurs, scientists are still trying to unravel the mystery of what caused a massive algae bloom off the northwest coast that left thousands of seabirds dead and may have sickened some surfers and kayakers. The bloom, which stretches roughly 300 miles from Newport, Ore., north to the Canadian border, still persists, though it's a shadow of its September and October peak. Whipped by waves and storms, the microscopic phytoplankton, which had turned the ocean a rust color, broke apart, releasing toxins and creating meringue-like foam that coated the feathers of birds like spilled oil. Up to 10,000 birds died of hypothermia in September, and researchers are still trying to come up with a count for October. Researchers are also checking reports that surfers and kayakers who came in contact with the foam may have suffered cold-like symptoms, including temporary loss of smell and taste. The toxins also may have become aerosolized and affected beachcombers. In another strange twist, pathologists performing necropsies found that some of the birds lacked normal bacteria in their stomachs and other internal organs. Blooms of the single-cell, saltwater algae species, known as *Akashiwo sanguinea*, have been found in Puget Sound, Chesapeake Bay and elsewhere around the world.

Our Environment

Toxic Algae – Continued: The bloom off the northwest coast, however, is huge compared with others. At its height, there were 1.5 million algae cells per quart of water. The bloom was up to 65 feet deep and miles wide. In only one other instance - a smaller bloom in 2007 in California's Monterey Bay - have the cells broken apart to create a toxic froth. And this particular specie of algae usually likes warmer water than that found off the Northwest Coast. No one is sure what ignited the bloom. Some scientists think it could be caused by climate change, which has raised ocean temperatures and made the water more acidic - both conditions could favor this algae species. Others say it could be the result of such weather conditions as El Nino or the Pacific decadal oscillation, a long-lived El Nino-like pattern of Pacific climate variability. The bloom could have been fed by nutrients washed down the Columbia River from farms in eastern Washington and Oregon, or from an ocean condition known as upwelling, where cold water rich with nutrients is pushed toward the surface by the wind.

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