

Volume 6 – No. 6  
February 2 – 9, 2010

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

#### North America

##### February 2

**Canada – CFIA warning:** The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) warns people with allergies to clams not to consume Knorr Soup du Jour brand Cream of Potato & Leek Soup Mix sold in 639-gram packages bearing UPC 0 68400 03780 4 and lot code RW3179.

**United States – Radioactive leaks:** Radioactive water leaks at the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant and other such facilities are raising doubts about nuclear safety. Critics cite the integrity of underground pipes that carry the contaminated water, a report said.

**United States – Disney pendants recalled:** Federal consumer-safety regulators announced the recall of "The Princess and The Frog" pendants sold at Wal-Mart stores because of high levels of the toxic metal cadmium. The action was taken voluntarily by Rhode Island-based jewelry company FAF Inc. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, which disclosed the recall, had been testing for cadmium in children's metal jewelry for several weeks in response to an Associated Press investigation that reported high levels of the known carcinogen in the Disney movie-themed pendants and other children's metal jewelry imported from China. The Walt Disney Co. set a zero-tolerance policy for cadmium in any children's jewelry bearing its brand and is now requiring that all products be tested for cadmium.

**United States – FDA warning:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says a rare but serious liver disorder has been reported in some HIV patients taking Videx/Videx EC. Videx (didanosine) is an antiretroviral medicine first approved in 1991, while Videx EC is a delayed-release version of Videx. Videx/Videx EC is used in combination with other antiretroviral medicines to treat human immunodeficiency virus infection in children and adults. FDA officials said 42 cases of non-cirrhotic portal hypertension were reported during an 18-year period among patients taking Videx/Videx EC. Four patients died from bleeding or liver failure after developing the condition.

**United States – Salami recall expanded:** Daniele Inc., a Burrillville meat-curing company, has added 17,000 pounds of sopressata to its recall of products because of salmonella contamination. On Jan 22, the company recalled 1.2 million pounds of pepper-coated salami after it was linked to a salmonella outbreak in 42 states. That salami was apparently contaminated by imported black pepper applied after the meat was processed. The sopressata, a different type of salami, does not include black pepper but was prepared in the same room.

##### February 4

**Canada – Whooping cough outbreak:** An outbreak of whooping cough in British Columbia's West Kootenay region is raising concern that the low rate of immunization in the area could put the lives of some children at risk. Health officials in the region said it has been two years since they have seen a case of whooping cough, but suddenly there are 19 confirmed cases of the infectious bacterial disease, also known as pertussis.

**United States – Snow storm warning:** A strong snowstorm is forecast to hit the mid-Atlantic region on the weekend. Up to 28 in/71 cm of snow is expected in areas that include Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Concerns over extensive power outages have been raised, as the snowfall will likely be very wet and heavy, and strong winds are expected. Flights have been canceled in multiple cities as far north as Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey and as far south as Virginia and West Virginia. Some Amtrak trains from Washington, D.C., have also been canceled. Many schools and businesses are closing early on February 5 in preparation for the storm.

### February 8

**Canada – Vancouver Winter Olympics:** Groups opposing the Winter Olympic Games, which are to be held in the city of Vancouver and the nearby ski resort of Whistler (both British Columbia province) on February 12-28, have threatened to hold multiple protests during the event. Members of the Olympic Resistance Network and their supporters are scheduled to gather February 12 at 15.00 (local time) at the Vancouver Art Gallery on Hornby Street, before proceeding to the BC Place Stadium on Pacific Boulevard, where the opening ceremony will commence at 16.30. A further protest is planned February 13 on Main Street and Terminal Avenue. Thousands of protesters are also expected to gather outside various venues during the course of the games in an attempt to cause disruption. The anti-Olympic groups claim all demonstrations will be conducted peacefully. Meanwhile, traffic and parking restrictions remain in place in many parts of Vancouver; the authorities have announced the closure of around 30 roads.

**United States – FDA warning:** The risk of a potentially fatal brain disorder with Biogen Idec Inc's multiple sclerosis drug, Tysabri, increases with usages. The prescribing instructions for Tysabri will be updated to warn of the higher risk associated with more treatment, the Food and Drug Administration said. The FDA said the warning was based on 31 confirmed cases of progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), a brain infection that can be fatal. Eight patients have died. The FDA believes that the clinical benefits of Tysabri continue to outweigh the potential risks. Tysabri was temporarily withdrawn from the market in 2005 because of its link to PML.

**United States – Mumps cases:** More than 300 people in Rockland (NY) have been diagnosed with the mumps as a cluster that started last summer in an upstate camp turned into the largest outbreak nationwide in years continues. The outbreak started in August in a Sullivan County, N.Y., summer camp for Orthodox Jewish boys, according to the CDC.

## South America

### February 3

**Brazil – Increased robberies:** The Public Security Secretariat of the south-eastern state of São Paulo released data that showed a record increase in robberies in the state; a total of 257,004 cases were recorded in 2009, an 18 percent increase from the previous year and well above the previous high of 248,406 set in 2003. The data underlines the persistent high crime levels in Brazil, where armed robberies and muggings are frequent. Opportunistic street crime such as pick-pocketing and theft continue to pose the greatest threat to business travelers and expatriates. Common locations for petty criminal acts include congested tourist areas, major hotels, popular beaches, as well as areas surrounding discothèques, bars, nightclubs and other similar establishments, especially at dusk and during the evening hours. Although violent crime is largely confined to low-income peripheral areas, wealthy residential areas in São Paulo city, such as Jardians Morumbi and Santo Amaro, are not immune.

**Colombia – Dengue fever:** There have now been 218 cases of classical dengue registered in 2010 in Cali, four times higher than the same period in 2009. The city's University del Valle Hospital (UVH) has recorded four dengue deaths in the month of January.

**Mexico – Drug-related violence:** Banners displayed in the central states of Querétaro, Guanajuato, Michoacán and Guerrero called on local populations to join the La Familia drug cartel in a fight against the Los Zetas cartel. The banners claimed that a regional alliance including the Milenio, Gulf, Familia Guanajuatense and Familia Mexiquense drug cartels would confront Los Zetas.

### February 3 – Mexico – continued:

The banners reflect the battle for control of the drugs trade in and around the capital Mexico City, which is a narcotic trading hub around which Querétaro, Guanajuato, Michoacán and Guerrero are located. Any violence between the La Familia and Los Zetas is expected to be concentrated in the four states where the banners were displayed. However, the majority of drug-related violence will continue to occur in cities along the US border such as Tijuana (Baja California state), Ciudad Juárez (Chihuahua), Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa (Tamaulipas state), where travel risks are rated as very high.

**Trinidad and Tobago – Water rationing:** Residents have been told that they will face a national water rationing plan as the twin-island republic grapples with a prolonged drought. The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) said that the low rainfall levels of last year, and further dry conditions this year, also made it imperative for there to be redistribution of water from areas with regular supplies to those more in need.

### February 4

**Brazil – Dengue on the rise:** Belo Horizonte now has 208 confirmed dengue cases since the beginning of this year, with the number of cases expected to rise. Officials said the infestation by the mosquito that transmits the virus, the *Aedes aegypti*, has reached worrying rates

**Venezuela – Demonstration advisory:** Pro- and anti-government demonstrators gathered in Caracas to mark the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Hugo Chavez's first failed coup attempt against then-President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992. Thousands of Chavez's supporters staged a peaceful march through Caracas. Meanwhile, police officers dispersed hundreds of anti-government student protesters with tear gas, plastic bullets and water cannons. Authorities stated that the unauthorized protest was dispersed in order to prevent violence between the opposing demonstrations. There were no reports of injuries or arrests.

### February 8

**Bolivia – Flooding:** Widespread flooding caused by incessant rainfall continued to affect large swathes of the country. The National Meteorological and Hydrological Service (SENAMHI) on the same day warned that the northern towns of Riberalta and Guayaramerín (both Beni department) and Puerto Rico (Pando department) were likely to be affected by floods. Reports indicate that the Beni, Yacuma, Mamoré, Iténez and Ichilo rivers, as well as some tributaries, have reached critical levels. Some central towns and cities, such as Trinidad (Beni) and Puerto Villarroel (Cochabamba department), along the Mamoré are reportedly also facing inundation. Meanwhile, severe traffic disruption was reported in the regional capitals of Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz department) and Cochabamba (Cochabamba) due to downpours. In addition, the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway was closed as a result of rising water levels on the Ichilo River. The UN is providing emergency aid to the worst-affected departments of Beni, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

**Mexico – Increased carjacking:** There has been a notable rise in the incidence of carjacking in the cities of Monterrey and San Pedro Garza García (both in Nuevo León state), with about 50 cases reported in the past month. All incidents have involved the use of small arms or knives, and recent incidents have reflected a willingness on the part of the attackers to resort to violence if resisted. Victims in several cases appear to have been trailed and observed for varying lengths of time prior to being attacked. Additionally, the Insured Risk Coordination Office (OCRA) has recently reported that carjacking is also on the rise in the federal capital Mexico City, as well as in the states of Mexico, Coahuila and Guerrero.

**Mexico – Drug violence in Mazatlan:** Gunmen stormed into a nightclub in the beach resort of Mazatlan and shot dead six people yesterday in what looked like the latest in a flurry of drug cartel attacks. Four men entered the nightclub and fatally shot two waiters and a patron on a crowded dance floor. They then turned back and shot three more people at the door.

### Europe

#### February 3

**Germany – Public sector strike:** Public sector employees observed a second consecutive day of warning strikes, causing flight delays at Düsseldorf International Airport and Cologne/Bonn Airport, which serve the eponymous cities in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and disrupting public transport services across the country. Ground staff at DUS and CGN stopped work between 04.00 and 08.00 (local time), while bus and tram services were disrupted in North Rhine-Westphalia and the south-western state of Baden-Württemberg as drivers observed the industrial action. The work stoppages are expected to continue until February 10, when negotiations with the government resume.

**Russia – Renewed violence:** Unidentified assailants fired several grenades at a railway station in Nazran, the North Caucasus republic of Ingushetia's largest city. The incident, which caused damage to the station but no casualties, followed two attacks involving grenades in the city on the previous day. A police officer was killed and two others injured when five grenades were fired at the interior ministry building, which also houses a police station. This attack came shortly after a booby-trapped grenade launcher exploded at a nursery school; a police officer was killed while trying to defuse the device and several other people were injured. It is suspected that the device was meant for a nearby border guards' building. Counter-insurgency operations against militant separatist groups are likely to continue in the North Caucasus, raising the possibility of retaliatory attacks and associated armed engagements between the security forces and suspected militants, both of which pose persistent indirect risks to bystanders. Rebel groups primarily target security personnel and government officials, though recent attacks have tended to focus on infrastructure. Strong security measures, including security checkpoints, can be anticipated across the region. However, attacks outside the North Caucasus are likely to remain sporadic because separatist extremist groups do not have the operational capacity to conduct a sustained campaign outside their strongholds.

#### February 8

**Bulgaria – Greek farmers' protest:** Protesting Greek farmers continued to block truck traffic at the border crossing between Kulata (Blagoevgrad oblast) and Promahonas (Greece), despite having agreed to lift all blockades until February 10, when negotiations with the Greek government are due to begin. The crossing remained open to car and bus traffic. Meanwhile, the National Association of Bulgarian Business threatened to set up similar blockades on the Bulgarian side of the border or to forcibly dismantle the blockades, which have severely affected cross-border traffic for the past 20 days.

**Germany – Anthrax heroin death:** The death of a heroin user in Germany has been linked to the anthrax outbreak that has killed nine people in Scotland. A patient in London is also being treated for the infection and officials said the German case suggested contaminated heroin was circulating across Europe.

**Germany – Neo-Nazi rally:** Thousands of neo-Nazis are expected to participate in a march organized by the Junge Landsmannschaft Ostdeutschland (Youth National Association of East Germany) February 13 in Dresden, in the south-eastern state of Saxony, to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Allied bombing of the city in 1945. Although the city authorities had earlier restricted the gathering to a stationary rally, the Dresden Administrative Court ruled that the group be permitted to march through the city in accordance with freedom of assembly laws. Thousands of anti-Nazi protesters, under the banner of the Allianz Dresden Nazifrei group, are planning to hold counter-demonstrations in the city on the same day.

## February 8

**Greece – Labor protests:** Several unions plan to stage a series of strikes between February 10 and 24 in protest at an austerity plan put forward by the government. Civil servants' trade union Adedy is scheduled to stage a 24-hour strike February 10, accompanied by a protest rally outside parliament. On the following day, communist trade union Pame will stage a 24-hour strike over the same issue. Additionally, the country's customs and tax officers will observe work stoppages on February 11 and 17, and the General Confederation of Greek Workers (Gsee), which represents private sector employees, intends to stage a 24-hour strike February 24 in support of public sector workers.

**Portugal – ETA bomb cache found:** Portuguese police have seized half a ton of explosives at a house that they say was being used as a base by the Basque separatist group ETA. The discovery, which also included bomb-making equipment, was made in the central Portugal town of Obidos. Fake licence plates, detonators and maps were also found, officials said. The ETA has been blamed for more than 820 deaths during its campaign in Spain.

## Middle East & Asia / Pacific

### February 2

**India – Protest in Kolkata:** The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which heads the eastern state of West Bengal's ruling Left Front coalition, will stage a rally February 7 at the Brigade Parade Ground in the state capital Kolkata. The gathering is being held to oppose separatist demands for a state of Gorkhaland to be carved out of West Bengal.

**Malaysia – New visa regulation:** Media reports indicate that authorities will tighten regulations for foreigners who require visas to enter the country; applicants will be subjected to individual assessments and required to present a detailed economic and personal background, a security bond and evidence of financial support from sponsors. It is not yet clear when the new measures will be introduced. The new regulations are believed to have been introduced because of security concerns, and certain unnamed countries in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East have reportedly been identified as areas of particular concern. U.S., Japanese and South Korean nationals, as well as citizens of most Commonwealth and European countries, do not need a visa for stays of up to three months. However, travelers may face more detailed immigration checks upon arrival at Malaysian airports.

**Pakistan – Ethnic clashes:** At least nine people have been killed in Karachi as clashes between rival ethnic groups continued. Violence over the weekend left 12 dead. The latest killings appear to be the result of targeted attacks by gunmen loyal to rival political groups. The conflict is between Pashtun political activists and the city's Urdu-speaking political workers. In Karachi's Orangi town, both Pashtun activists working for the Awami National Party (ANP) and Urdu-speaking workers loyal to the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) party have set up road blocks.

### February 3

**China – Mercury poisoning:** Coca-Cola Co. is working with police to determine how two people fell ill with suspected mercury poisoning after reportedly drinking Sprite. Police in Beijing are investigating possible links between the Sprite soft drink and two suspected cases of mercury poisoning, in November last year and January 2010. Coca-Cola Co. has not found any problem at its bottling or production facilities, according to a spokesperson.

### February 3

**China – Melamine contaminated milk:** China has dispatched inspectors to 16 provinces to urge local governments to thoroughly investigate cases concerning food safety, the government's latest move to boost food safety after melamine-tainted milk products have reportedly resurfaced even after the 2008 crackdown on contaminated milk. Any law-breaking concerning food safety will be severely dealt with, an official with the National Food Safety Rectification Office said. Milk powder laced with melamine, which should have been destroyed, has resurfaced in several Chinese provinces. Melamine is an industrial compound which can give a false positive on protein tests and cause kidney stones. Melamine-contaminated milk products left at least six children dead and 300,000 sickened in 2008

**India – Protest rally in Delhi:** Supporters of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will stage a protest February 10 in the capital New Delhi. Participants will march from the Jantar Mantar monument on Sansad Marg to the parliament building at Sansad Bhavan in the city centre, while associated protests will also be held in the states of Orissa and Manipur. The events are part of a nationwide BJP campaign, which began January 31 and are expected to continue until February 14,

**India – Curfew in Srinagar:** Authorities imposed a curfew in Srinagar, the summer capital of the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir. The measure will be applied to the city's Batmaloo, Maisuma, Basant Bagh and Gaw Kadal areas following three consecutive days of strikes and violent protests triggered by the January 31 killing of a 16-year-old boy during clashes between protesters and the police in Srinagar's Rajouri Kadal area. Security forces are patrolling the streets of the city while shops and other businesses remain closed. Media reports claimed at least 100 people have been injured since the period of unrest began.

**Mongolia – Fierce winter hardship:** Thousands of nomad families face food shortages and severe poverty after a bitter winter killed off at least 1.7 million animals, including sheep, camels and cattle. Temperatures plunged as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius (-58 degrees Fahrenheit) in recent weeks, after a long, dry summer that left farmers with too little fodder for their herds, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a report. Without assistance the disastrous weather pattern – known locally as a "zud" – is likely to spark mass migration to cities later this year, the report warned. In the past the shift to urban life has been extremely traumatic for herder families, because they have to make huge changes in their way of life, and often struggle to get employment, healthcare and education. Temperatures are the lowest in three decades

**Sri Lanka – Tension remains high:** Around 5,000 opposition activists marched through the streets of the capital Colombo before holding a rally in Hyde Park. The gatherings were attended by members of several civil organizations, including the United National Alliance (UNA) – comprising the United National Party (UNP), the People's Liberation Front (JVP, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) – and were staged to denounce the January 26 presidential election won by incumbent President Mahinda Rajapaksa, which the demonstrators claim was fraudulent. Several streets were blocked and significant traffic disruption was reported during the events. On the same day, more than 30 opposition activists were arrested in connection with an alleged assassination plot against Rajapaksa; those detained include several high-ranking soldiers.

### February 4

**Singapore – Dengue fever outbreak:** A building company was fined S\$2,000 after authorities found 18 confirmed cases of dengue fever at its site in Balestier. This forms the largest dengue cluster this year. Authorities found two mosquito breeding grounds at the site along Akyab Road. Last week, dengue fever cases in Singapore rose to 131 - a sharp 70 per cent increase from the previous week. The 18 cases were construction workers from China and Bangladesh. The builder said it will increase pest control checks to twice a week.

### February 4

**Yemen – Increases in fuel prices:** The government raised fuel prices in an attempt to cut fuel subsidies; as of February 1, the prices of petrol, diesel and kerosene increased by 8.5 percent, 11.5 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively. The measure is part of an economic reform aimed at reducing the country's fiscal deficit; it also coincides with continuing power cuts which affect at least 2m residents across the country, including in the capital Sana'a. Demonstrations are possible should further increases in fuel prices be implemented, as the prolonged power crisis is already causing public discontent. Any protests would have the potential to turn violent at short notice, as the security forces do not hesitate to use force to disperse large unruly gatherings.

### February 8

**China – New Year celebration:** February 14 marks the Chinese New Year. This is the year of "Tiger". The people will celebrate the Spring Festival with large populations of ethnic Chinese along with Koreans, Tibetans and Bhutanese, Mongolians, and Vietnamese. Outside of Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, Chinese New Year is also celebrated in countries with significant Han Chinese populations, such as Singapore, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The New Year greeting is "Xin Nian Kuai Le" (新年快乐). In China, most of the activities will start slowing down from February 11 for two weeks. Governmental offices, businesses and most of the activities will shut down from February 13 until 20.



## Africa

### February 2

**Benin – Cholera outbreak:** At least five people have died from cholera in the last two weeks in an outbreak. Most of the 70 cases were in Bonou, 90 km east of Cotonou, although there have been three cases and one death in the capital. Cholera generally spreads during the rainy season when flooding can contaminate water sources. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) says cholera in the dry season is uncommon but it does occur. Health officials are also advising people to observe proper hygiene – including thoroughly washing hands and food.

**Côte d'Ivoire – Power rationing:** Authorities announced that nationwide power rationing measures will last until May, due to an electricity shortage caused by a breakdown at the privately-owned Azito power plant, which usually generates more than 30 percent of the country's electricity. Officials have stated that details about the timings and duration of the power cuts will be relayed through the media in the coming days.

### February 3

**Botswana – Increased crime:** Several incidents of crime targeting shopping centers (malls) and residences have been reported recently in the capital Gaborone. The criminals have reportedly tended to operate in groups and have been targeting shoppers, particularly at Game City Mall on Lobatse Road in the southwest of the city. Additionally, there have been reports of people attempting to enter houses by impersonating government officials or representatives of security companies. The recent incidents have typically involved 'grab and run' tactics and have been largely non-violent, but assailants are normally armed with knives, rods or other small weapons and have threatened violence if challenged. There has been a steady increase in such incidents over the past few years, particularly in Gaborone and Francistown; however, violent crime in the country remains at one of the lowest levels in the region.

## February 3

**Kenya – Security along Somali border:** The government announced the deployment of additional troops and increased security patrols along the border with Somalia. The latest decision by the government comes in response to increased security threats in southern Somalia, amid concerns of the conflict spilling over into Kenya.

**Senegal – Renewed violence:** Local officials confirmed that more than 500 residents from the villages of Sanou 1, Sanou 2 and Sanou 3, near the south-western town of Sédhiou (Casamance area, Sédhiou department) had fled across the border into neighboring Guinea-Bissau following a rebel attack. The rebels, believed to be members of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), struck overnight on January 29-30, setting homes and crops alight, stealing food and demanding villagers leave the area. The attack is the latest in a series of incidents of violence in Casamance in recent months. While it does not signal the resurgence of a coordinate separatist campaign, the incident serves to underline the volatility of the security situation in Casamance, where travel risks are rated as medium, as compared with Senegal's low overall rating.

## February 4

**Nigeria – Fuel crisis:** The nation-wide fuel crisis has grown acute in the last three months. However, a coordinated government campaign hopes to alleviate the situation within the next week. Personnel are likely to continue to experience delays at petrol stations and disruption to business activities in the short term. A prolonged shortage is also liable to prompt protests in the coming days. Such gatherings are more likely to occur in major cities, including the capital Abuja and Lagos, the country's largest city, though protests could also occur in rural areas hit by shortages. Any such rallies could cause localized traffic disruption. Security forces have used firearms against demonstrators in the past, posing significant incidental risks to bystanders.

**South Africa – Flooding continues:** Flooding caused by incessant rain on February 3-4 continued to cause disruption in the provinces of Gauteng, Free State and North West. In Gauteng, traffic was disrupted along sections of highways N1, M1, and the Witkoppen main road; the suburbs of Sunninghill, Fourways and Sandton in the provincial capital Johannesburg have also been severely affected. Traffic congestion was reportedly severe on Grayston Drive, one of the main roads to and from Sandton. On the previous day, officials warned people to continue to stay away from the Vaal River (Gauteng), which has overflowed, despite a reduction in floodwaters that have inundated nearby communities. Authorities indefinitely closed the Bloemhof Dam and Wolverspruit nature reserves (North West) following severe flood damage. At least five people have been killed in flood-related accidents in Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape provinces since January 25.

## February 8

**Togo – Renewed protests:** More than 10,000 people demonstrated on the streets of the capital Lomé against a decision by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to ban the national football (soccer) team from playing in the next two African Cup of Nations tournaments. The rally's organizers warned that weekly protests would be staged in different parts of the country until the CAF repealed its decision.

**Zimbabwe – Public sector workers' protest:** Approximately 4,000 striking health workers, school teachers and university lecturers staged a rally in the central area of the capital Harare to demand higher wages. The unions launched the current work stoppage following a breakdown in negotiations with the government and have stated that the industrial action would continue until the government addresses their demands.

### Avian Influenza

#### Outbreaks:

**Cambodia:** in the southern province of Takeo. **Nepal:** at Gairapatan area in Pokhara.

### Special – A/H1N1 - Swine Flu – Updates

**Canada - A dozen deaths due to vaccine:** There were 12 possible deaths connected to the H1N1 vaccine since the beginning of the vaccination campaign in Canada. There were also 24 cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome, as well as four pregnant women whose fetuses died. A national committee is examining cases of severe side effects of the vaccine.



### From Around the World

#### **Lancet formally retracts 1998 paper linking vaccine and autism:**

The medical journal *The Lancet* withdrew a 1998 study linking autism with inoculation against three childhood illnesses, a paper that caused uproar and an enduring backlash against vaccination. The British journal said it was acting in light of an ethics judgment last week by Britain's General Medical Council against Andrew Wakefield, the study's lead researcher. "We fully retract this paper from the published record," *The Lancet's* editors said in a statement published online. The 1998 paper suggested there might be a connection between autism and a triple vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR). Other experts insisted the claim was spurious, but many parents in Britain were deeply alarmed and refused to have their children vaccinated. The slump has yet to fully recover today and as a result there has been a rise in measles, placing unprotected young lives at risk, say doctors. The scare over the vaccine also occurred to a lesser extent in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In 2004, 10 of the paper's 13 authors distanced themselves from part of the study, publishing what they called a "retraction of an interpretation." The General Medical Council attacked Wakefield for "unethical" research methods and for showing a "callous disregard" for young test subjects.

**Brits cautioned for overseas drug use:** British nationals should take extra care not to get involved with drugs overseas, as new detention figures reveal the extent of the problem across the globe. New data released by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office reveals that 1,057 of the 2,582 British nationals detained overseas at the end of September 2009 were held on drug charges. In South America, 99 percent of the British nationals detained by local authorities were held for drug crimes, with Brazil and Peru showing the highest figures. In Asia, half of British national detentions were for drugs with the highest figures occurring in Thailand and Japan. Spain detained the highest actual number of British nationals for drugs offences (207), followed by the United States (141) and Thailand (79). With regard to overall detentions, the United States detained the highest number of British nationals (669) followed by Spain (357) and Australia (271). British nationals often have unrealistic expectations of what their embassies can do for them if they are arrested overseas. Just over half of consular time is spent supporting British nationals arrested and detained overseas.

### From Around the World

**Experts say 40 percent of cancers could be prevented:** Forty percent of the 12 million people diagnosed with cancer worldwide each year could avert the killer disease by protecting themselves against infections and changing their lifestyles, experts say. A report by the Geneva-based International Union Against Cancer (UICC) highlighted nine infections that can lead to cancer and urged health officials to drive home the importance of vaccines and lifestyle changes in fighting the disease. "If there was an announcement that somebody had discovered a cure for 40 percent of the world's cancers, there would quite justifiably be huge jubilation," UICC president David Hill told Reuters in a telephone interview. "But the fact is that we have, now, the knowledge to prevent 40 percent of cancers. The tragedy is we're not using it." Cervical and liver cancer, both caused by infections which can be prevented with vaccines, should be top priorities, the report said, not only in rich nations, but also in developing countries where 80 percent of global cervical cancer occurs. Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide and the total number of cases globally is increasing, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The number of global cancer deaths is projected to rise by 45 percent (from 7.9 million to 11.5 million deaths) between the years 2007 to 2030, driven partly by a growing and aging global population. The UICC said it wanted to focus policymakers' attention on cancer-preventing vaccines – for example against the human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes cervical cancer, and others against hepatitis B, which causes liver disease and cancer. "Policymakers around the world have the opportunity and obligation to use these vaccines to save people's lives and educate their communities towards lifestyle choices and control measures that reduce their risk of cancer," Cary Adams, UICC's chief executive, said in a commentary on the report. Other cancer-causing infections include hepatitis C, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Epstein Barr, a herpes-type virus transmitted by saliva. The experts said the risk of developing cancer could potentially be reduced by up to 40 percent if full immunization and prevention measures were deployed and combined with simple lifestyle changes like quitting smoking, eating healthily, limiting alcohol intake and reducing sun exposure.

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### Our Environment

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**Dengue and climate change:** World Health Organization Chief Margaret Chan was disappointed that there was no deal made during the December Copenhagen Summit, as she noted that health problems will be magnified under climate change. In 2008, WHO warned that climate change was increasing the incidence of dengue fever and other infectious diseases in the country. That year, Health Secretary Francisco Duque cautioned that global warming may have contributed to a 43 percent rise in the number of dengue cases in the Philippines for the first half of the year. He noted that "the increase in the number of dengue cases may be attributed to the constantly changing climate brought by global warming as well as congestion in urban areas". (In 2009, the Department of Health Regional Epidemiological Surveillance Unit reported a 42 percent rise in dengue cases in the region compared to the same period of January to October last year. The upsurge in dengue is one of the clearest manifestations of climate change. In the past, dengue peaked only during the rainy season. However, the unpredictable weather conditions brought about by climate change has made the deadly disease a year-round occurrence in our country, said Duque.

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