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Health & Travel security Insights from around the five continents

North America

February 16

Canada – Olympic protesters turn violent: Police in riot gear confronted more than 200 masked protesters who hurled newspaper boxes through display windows of a popular department store in downtown Vancouver that was selling Olympic souvenirs. Seven people were arrested after officers carrying clubs and shields quashed the downtown protest on the opening day of competition at the Vancouver Olympics. There were no immediate reports of injuries. Those arrested could face a variety of charges, including assault, Police Chief Jim Chu said. At least one could be charged with weapons possession for wrapping a bicycle chain around his fist and threatening passers-by. None of the protesters was immediately identified. Chu said police knew in advance about the protest, but decided to move in once they knew "criminals" were involved. Authorities said they were wary of masked anarchists who dress in black and use a tactic called "Black Block" to hide their identities. Among them was a loosely organized group from central Canada known to disrupt events that draw media coverage, police said. Up until this incident all reported protests had taken place peacefully.

February 18

United States – Small plane crashes into Texas building: A small passenger plane crashed into a building in Austin, Texas. The Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) has stated that firefighters were immediately at the scene of the crash, which occurred on Research Boulevard. The local interstate reportedly came to a halt and officials state that they remain unclear as to the cause of the crash.

February 19

United States – Train crash in Texas: Twenty-two cars of a Houston-bound Burlington Northern Santa Fe freight train derailed in Santa Fe, spilling a hazardous substance. Authorities evacuated individuals within a 1.6 km (1 mile) radius of the crash, but have since lifted the order. A nearby stretch of Highway 6 was closed to traffic but there were no injuries in the crash.

United States – Water illness found in Pennsylvania: The Allegheny County Health Department has released a report stating that a bacterial illness is causing an outbreak of diarrhea in the region of the city Pittsburgh. The health department says it has confirmed 60 cases of shigellosis (shih-gel-LOH'-sis) since October. An outbreak in 1996 was far more severe, causing nearly 600 cases; however, the 60 recently recorded cases is far more than the 20 or so cases typically seen each year. The health department says many people who have the illness never get diagnosed with it, so they assume there are far more cases in the county than they've confirmed. The bacteria can be spread person to person or through contaminated food, or by not washing your hands after changing diapers or using the toilet. Symptoms, including cramps and fever, can last a week.

February 19

United States – Salami recall expands: The recall of salami products from the Burrillville-based Daniele Inc. has expanded to include 115,000 pounds of "Hot Salame Panino" products, which has also been linked to a nationwide outbreak of salmonella. With the panini, the culprit may be crushed red pepper instead of the ground black pepper implicated in the previous recalls. Further testing will determine whether the salmonella has the same genetic fingerprint as the bacteria involved in the outbreak, which has spread to 44 states. Meanwhile, two Daniele plants have passed USDA screening tests and have resumed production; however, no products are being shipped yet. The company has hired a laboratory that is operating out of trailers at the plants in order to test products.

Canada – Student ship sinks off the coast of Rio de Janeiro: A ship carrying Canadian students reportedly sunk 300km off of the Brazilian coast, close to the city of Rio de Janeiro. The ship, The Concordia, was part of a program offered by West Island College International of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. It was a three-masted sailing ship, also equipped with a motor that could accommodate 66 people, crew and passengers. According to reports from the Brazilian navy, all of the students and crew were found alive and floating in life rafts in the Ocean. They were rescued by two different passenger ships.

South America

February 17

Chile – Preparations begin for 2010 H1N1 season: The Chilean government has purchased 2 million doses of the vaccine against the AH1N1 flu virus for the immunization campaign that begins in the second half of March. It will be provided free to health workers, pregnant women, people with chronic illnesses and children ages 6-24 months. People older than 60 will be excluded from the priority group this year unless they suffer from chronic health conditions. The decision to exclude the elderly was made because health officials have stated that the only virus circulating in the country is AH1N1, with the seasonal flu strain barely registering. According to the Health Department, those born before 1957 are somewhat immunized against the AH1N1 strain. The decision could be reversed if conditions change. Those who are not members of the priority groups can obtain vaccinations from the private sector without a prescription, but they should only do so under a doctor's orders. In 2009, swine flu affected 368,129 people in Chile, resulting in 150 deaths. The year 2010 could be "a very mild year in terms of influenza, with activity mainly from the pandemic strain and no other strain circulating in the country, said the deputy health minister.

February 18

Brazil – Rainfall causing severe flooding: Heavy rains caused transportation disruptions in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Low visibility affected operations at Rio de Janeiro's Santos Dumont Domestic Airport (SBRJ/SDU), forcing at least four aircraft to divert to Rio de Janeiro International Airport (SBGL/GIG). In Sao Paulo, the rains led to the temporary closing of Congonhas Domestic Airport (SBSP/CGH). Flooding also severely complicated traffic on major thoroughfares of Sao Paulo, including Rodovia dos Bandeirantes, Via Anhanguera, Rodovia Castello Branco, Presidente Dutra and Marginal Tiete. Flooding was reported in northern, central and southeastern portions of the city.

February 19

Brazil – Dengue outbreak near capital: The Ministry of Health has declared an epidemic of dengue fever in the states of Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Acre, Roraima and Goias. Officials have reported nearly 12,700 dengue fever infections and five related deaths in 2010. The Brazilian government has launched an information campaign to prevent the spread of mosquitoes and has warned against a possible spike in cases following Carnival celebrations. Historically, the greatest numbers of dengue cases in Brazil occur November-January, although the high-risk period extends through May.

Dominican Republic – Stowaway Killed: A stowaway was killed when he fell from the wheel well of an Amerijet International cargo aircraft. The Air Boeing 767-200 aircraft was performing flight M6-840 from Santo Domingo's Las Americas International Airport (MDS/SDQ) to Miami, Florida, at the time of the incident. The stowaway apparently fell from the aircraft upon takeoff from the Cabo Caucedo cargo terminal. The incident reportedly delayed the arrival and departure of at least seven flights at the Santo Domingo airport; another aircraft was diverted to Punta Cana as a result. Dominican authorities have recovered the body, but the stowaway's identity has not yet been released; it is also not known how the individual gained access to the aircraft.

Europe

February 15

United Kingdom – Anti-nuclear rally: Several hundred people gathered to protest nuclear arms and nuclear energy in Aldermaston, approximately 75 km (47 miles) west of London. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) organized the demonstration, in which two British Nobel Peace Prize winners participated. A former air force base in Aldermaston houses a production facility for nuclear warheads. Police arrested 10 people, five of whom had trespassed into the air base grounds. The demonstration was the biggest in years in the CND's decades-long attempt to abolish nuclear weapons in the UK. The UK is currently not planning to significantly alter its nuclear weapons policy. The government maintains that it will reduce its stockpile but not give up weapons entirely; a political dispute over warhead modernization and its funding is ongoing.

February 16

Ukraine – Tymoshenko refuses to resign: Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko has announced that she will not resign and will continue working to consolidate the parliamentary coalition, the Our Ukraine-People's Self-Defense faction. Reports confirmed that Tymoshenko does not plan to step down and that she would seek to invalidate her position through the country's courts, proving that vote rigging took place in the second round of the presidential election. Tymoshenko's decision will undoubtedly cause mass disturbances as a show-down looms between the two dominant political factions in Ukraine.

February 17

Italy / Germany – Airlines strike: Major airlines throughout Europe have been paralyzed by several strikes in an effort by employees to improve working environments and the fiscal commitments by their employers. Pilots for German airline Lufthansa voted on February 17 to go on a four-day strike starting at midnight Monday, February 22, after negotiations for higher pay broke down in Frankfurt. The strike is also expected to affect both Lufthansa's cargo operations and its low-cost subsidiary Germanwings.

February 17 – Italy/Germany – continued:

More than 90 percent of the union representing Lufthansa pilots voted in favor of the action, which will involve the airline's 4,500 flight deck members. Meanwhile the previous day Italian pilots and other personnel from Alitalia (AZ), Meridiana (IG) and Air One (CT) airlines held one-day strikes to protest employment conditions and wages. The Italian companies have stated that the work-stoppage only affected local flights and that all international flights remained on schedule. Lufthansa, however, continues to brace for massive delays and flight cancellations.

February 18

United Kingdom / Belgium – Eurostar service suspended: Eurostar announced that it will formally extend the suspension of its London-Brussels route through at least Feb. 22. The suspension was initially caused by a train crash near Buizingen, Belgium. Passengers will still be able to book tickets for the London-Brussels route, however. Eurostar offers service from London to the French city of Lille and then a subsequent motor coach connection to Brussels. All other Eurostar service will not be affected by the suspension.

February 19

Italy – Rally for immigrant rights: Dozens of activists fighting for the rights of illegal immigrants in Italy will gathered for a demonstration at Milan's Pasteur metro station, approximately 1 km (0.6 miles) north of the city's main train station. Immigration has become a polarizing topic in Milan, with increasing numbers of rallies by anti-immigrant and immigrant-rights activists. The recent killing of an Egyptian boy is the latest evidence of the polarized and tense climate over immigration issues in the city; counter demonstrations are likely.

February 21

Belgium – Eurostar offers limited service: Eurostar announced that limited services would be available on 22-26 February to and from the capital Brussels; however, trains will take an alternative route circumventing the site of a train collision on 15 February in the Brussels area, increasing travel time by 50 minutes. In addition, Eurostar has put in place a shuttle coach service linking Lille (France) to Brussels. Eurostar indicated that normal operations would not resume until at least 2 March, as investigations continue at the location of the accident. In addition, limited Thalys services are available on the Brussels-Paris (France) and Brussels-Amsterdam (Netherlands) routes; the high-speed train operator announced that normal services were expected to fully resume by the beginning of March.

France – Air traffic controllers to strike: Four air traffic controllers' unions are scheduled on 23-27 February to stage a nationwide strike in protest at job cuts and to denounce a proposed change in the status of Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile (DGAC), the country's civil aviation authority. However, the Syndicat national des contrôleurs aériens (SNCTA) union, which represents more than 50 percent of air traffic controllers, opted not to participate in the industrial action. The DGAC stated that it would announce on 22 February the disruption to flight schedules that the strike is expected to cause.

United Kingdom – Norovirus outbreak: Two Norfolk hospitals are battling outbreaks of the winter vomiting norovirus bug. Visitors to ward two at Gorleston's James Paget University Hospital are being asked to make sure they use antiseptic gel after an outbreak of the norovirus bug. And The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn has closed its 34 bed Necton ward for the care of the elderly to new patients and has asked visitors to follows all of its wards' hygiene procedures.

Middle East & Asia / Pacific

February 15

Sri Lanka – Explosions continue: Two grenades exploded in the northern city of Jaffna at 1530 local time. The blasts occurred at the Puliadi Mambalam Junction along A9 Road, killing at least two people and injuring more than six others. Authorities believe that school children discovered the grenades, which were possibly left over from the civil war.

February 16

China – Tainted milk supposedly destroyed: China assured consumers most of the tainted milk products that resurfaced in recent months have been destroyed, saying none had made it to store shelves or been exported. The health ministry's weekend statement came after revelations that milk powder tainted with the industrial chemical melamine, which was supposed to have been destroyed after a 2008 scandal, had reappeared around the country. Melamine-contaminated milk products have been found in Shanghai and in more than four other provinces across China, it said. In each case, companies had hidden contaminated milk powder or falsified inspection reports, the ministry said. The statement reiterated the order to destroy all tainted milk supplies and vowed to crack down on anyone involved in criminal acts. Six babies died and 300,000 others fell ill in 2008 after they were fed contaminated dairy products.

February 17

Russia/Georgia – Military base in Abkhazia: Russia and the Georgian rebel region of Abkhazia signed a deal allowing Moscow to establish a military base on its soil. The agreement will allow Russia to use and update the infrastructure of an existing military base in the port town of Gudauta, just north of the capital Aukhumi, as well as to form a joint group of forces. There are already 1,700 servicemen there, but the base would eventually accommodate at least 3,000 troops, including units of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards. Western powers and the NATO alliance have repeatedly expressed concern that a Moscow-led military build-up in Abkhazia threatens Georgia's territorial integrity.

Syria – Thaw in U.S. relations: Robert Ford has been nominated by President Obama as the first U.S. ambassador to Syria since Washington recalled its envoy after Lebanon's former prime minister Rafiq Hariri was killed in February 2005 in a bombing blamed on Syria. Ford needs to be confirmed by the Senate, where many Republicans disagree with Obama's primary foreign policy stance of keeping communication open and engaging historic foes. An American charm offensive in the region is already underway, as the U.S.' highest ranking diplomat met with President Bashar al-Assad, and American business owners are flocking to Syria to establish relationships ahead of Ford's arrival.

February 18

India – Maoist attacks increasing: At least 10 people died when heavily armed Maoist rebels attacked and opened indiscriminate fire in Kasari village in the Jamui district in eastern Bihar State. The rebels also set several houses ablaze and abducted six villagers. The Maoists reportedly left leaflets at the site, claiming that the attack was in retaliation against the recent killings of eight Maoist activists allegedly by the villagers. The attack came two days after the Maoist attack on a paramilitary camp in West Bengal's West Midnapore district that left 24 security personnel dead. Nearly 100 Maoists armed with sophisticated weapons had exploded landmines near the Silda camp before barging inside with a volley of fire on Feb. 15.

February 18 – India – continued:

The violence highlights the growing power of the insurgents, who are now active in 20 of the country's 28 states. The government has announced its intention to launch Operation Green Hunt, in order to target the rebels in their stronghold states of Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has repeatedly termed the Maoist insurgency - which started as a peasant uprising in 1967 - as the country's main home-grown threat to security.

Indonesia – Annual flood season begins: Heavy rain caused severe flooding in several areas of Indonesia, including in the capital city of Jakarta. The area most affected by the rains was East Jakarta, which is currently inundated with floodwaters; the heaviest flooding was reported in Kampung Pulo, where waters reached up to 10 ft/3 m. In addition to Jakarta, severe flooding was also reported in Indramayo in West Java after the Cimanuk River dam burst. The failed dam primarily affected residents in Jatibarang and Pilang Sari. Other areas, including in Bojonegoro in East Java, reported that high waters flooded four villages. Jakarta and the surrounding areas experience annual floods and transportation delays can be expected in the capital. Travelers should updated by local media.

Yemen – Northern peace – Southern independence: Residents of south Yemen will launch an intifada, or uprising, with the aim of obtaining independence for the region, says a separatist leader Tareq Al Fadhli. Late last week, the government signed a peace deal with northern Shia rebels, the al Houthi, which appears to be holding. Al Fadhli, who heads the Southern Movement, says that the demonstrations and protests will be peaceful. He was formerly an ally of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has ruled Yemen since the union between north and south in 1990, but switched sides and now supports independence for the south. South Yemen became an independent state following the end of British rule in 1967. It was united with the north in 1990, when Yemen became the Arabian Peninsula's only republic. Southerners seceded in 1994, sparking a short-lived civil war that ended with the region overrun by northern troops.

February 19

Russian Federation – Major explosions in Ingushetia: As many as five explosions just outside Nazran in Ingushetia killed at least two people and wounded another 28 people Feb. 19. All of the casualties, except one civilian fatality, were police officers, including the city's police chief. A local resident reportedly informed police of a device discovered in one of his properties. The blasts occurred while police tried to disarm the explosive.

February 21

Australia – Dengue fever warning: A soldier who recently returned from East Timor is the latest person to be struck down by dengue fever. The returned serviceman brought the most recent imported case of the mosquito-borne disease to Townsville this week but it was thought he contracted the illness overseas. The region's dengue fever tally remained at just 13 cases yesterday, but with heavy rain across North Queensland over the past week authorities have warned residents not to be complacent. North Queensland was affected by the worse dengue fever epidemic to hit the State in more than 50 years last wet season.

India – Security heightened over cricket match: The Rajasthan government has boosted security in the state capital, Jaipur, for the one-day international cricket match between India and South Africa. Security has been tightened in and around the Sawai Mansingh Stadium - the match venue - as well as at Jaipur Airport (JAI), travel routes and the hotels of both teams. Authorities have not provided any details on the alleged terror threat, but security concerns are heightened in India following the Feb. 13 bombing in Pune.

February 21

Philippines – Transport operators to strike: Transport operators belonging to the Alliance of Concerned Transport Organizations (ACTO) on 23 February are planning to stage a strike in the capital Manila. The industrial action is being organized to pressure the government to address the issue of widespread corruption among transport regulating bodies that is affecting operators of the largely independent jeepneys (extended jeeps used as a shared taxis). Transport representatives claim that local government agencies are currently levying various overlapping fees and fines that unduly limit the earnings of jeepney drivers.

Africa

February 16

Guinea – New interim government obtains power: Guinean authorities have appointed a transitional government to steer the country from military to civilian rule, an official statement has said. The 34-member line-up was selected by interim Prime Minister Jean Marie Dore, appointed last month by the general in charge of Guinea, Sekouba Konate. The new caretaker government consists both of civilian and military leaders. Mr. Dore has pledged to hold elections within six months, ending a crisis sparked by a coup in December 2008. That would lead to the first democratically-elected administration in Guinea, which has been controlled by the military for decades. Mr. Dore was appointed by General Konate in January after crisis talks in which the military government agreed on a timetable to step down. He has vowed to reform the armed forces and prioritize the economic revival of Guinea - the world's largest exporter of bauxite.

February 17

Cote d'Ivoire – Government dissolved: President Laurent Gbagbo has dissolved the Government of Cote d'Ivoire and disbanded the federal election commission, delegating his Prime Minister, Guillaume Soro, to form a new government by the end of the week of February 15, 2010. However, Gbagbo has already stated that there will be indefinite delays in forming the new government, increasing the possibility of future political violence and instability. Protests have already broken out in Abidjan, with hundreds of people blocking roads and manning roadblocks.

Egypt – Proselytizing American arrested: A U.S. national, who was accused of evangelising in Egypt, was arrested on arrival at Cairo airport and deported overnight. Airport authorities picked up the 71-year-old man, who was on a list of people banned from entering Egypt, on his arrival from New York and immediately deported him.

Nigeria – Religious unrest continues: Soldiers have moved in to halt a confrontation as Christians tried to stop Muslims from burying a dead child in a cemetery in the Naraguta area near the city of Jos. More than 300 people died last month during days of rioting in Jos between religious groups. Thousands of police and military personnel were deployed to control the violence. Jos, the capital of Plateau state, lies between Nigeria's mainly Muslim north and Christian south and has seen several outbreaks of sectarian violence within the last year. Analysts say the real cause of the violence is a struggle for political superiority in the city.

February 18

Niger – Presidential coup suspected: At approximately 1300 local time (1200 UTC) heavy gunfire was reported near the presidential office and ministry buildings in Niamey, Niger's capital, in a coup attempt against President Mamadou Tandja. Police officials report that they believe the pro-coup forces traveled to Niamey in armored vehicles from outside the capital; gunfire reportedly erupted as the presidential guard clashed with the attackers. A group of soldiers identifying themselves as the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSRD) led by Salou Djibo has taken responsibility for the coup against President Tandja. Spokesperson Colonel Goukoye Abdoukarim read a statement on state television several hours later announcing that the group has suspended the constitution and dissolved the government. Abdoukarim also ordered a dusk-to-dawn curfew (1800-0600) and the closures of the country's air and land borders. Foreign diplomats and local residents report that Tandja and several government ministers were taken from the presidential palace in Niamey after an hour-long gun battle. Tandja's current location is unknown, but reports indicate the president is being held along with several government ministers in a military installation in Tondibia, about 20 km (15 miles) west of the capital. Air France (AF) suspended all flights to Niamey International Airport (NIM) Feb. 18. Other airlines could follow if the situation in the country further deteriorates.

February 19

Somalia – Rebel alliance breaks apart: Fighting between Hizbul Islam and Al-Shabaab militants broke out on Feb. 18 in the town of Doble, near the border with Kenya and a major road to the port city of Kismayo. Hizbul Islam rebels reportedly killed 11 insurgents during the attack on the town controlled by Al-Shabaab militants. The two rebel groups were formerly allied in their fight against the Transitional Federal Government, which is seated in Mogadishu. However, the alliance deteriorated in part because of a disagreement over revenues obtained from Kismayo's port and more clashes are likely. The continuing conflict has begun to spill over into neighbouring Kenya and threatens regional security.

South Africa – Taxi drivers' riot: Police closed the Germiston taxi terminal after violence broke out in the early morning. Germiston is 15 km (9.3 miles) east of Johannesburg on the route to OR Tambo International Airport (JNB). Taxi-related violence in South Africa tends to result in retaliation attacks on rival taxi associations, who compete for dominance on profitable routes. The closure of the taxi terminal could affect transportation between JNB and central Johannesburg, causing travel delays.

Avian Influenza

Egypt – Two new cases confirmed in Al Minufiyah province: On Feb. 17, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed two new human cases of avian (H5N1) influenza in Egypt, bringing the 2010 total to nine. One patient - a 32-year-old man from the Ashmon district of Al Minufiyah Province - was hospitalized on Feb. 8 and is listed in stable condition. The other - a 29-year-old pregnant woman from the Elsadat district of Al Minufiyah - was hospitalized on Feb. 12 but died the next day. Authorities reported that both patients had been in contact with sick and dead poultry. Egyptian officials also reported two deaths among previously reported cases in 2010. This brings the total number of avian influenza fatalities in Egypt in 2010 to three. Most human cases of avian (H5N1) influenza occur in the Nile Delta region. The most recent cases have occurred in the following provinces: Ad Daqahliyah; Al Minufiyah; Ash Sharqiyah; Asyut; Bani Suwayf; and Helwan.

Avian Influenza – H5N1 – Continued:

Egypt: Officials have also reported dozens of avian (H5N1) influenza outbreaks among poultry in many provinces along the Nile River. Since 2006, authorities have confirmed 99 human cases, including 30 deaths. In 2009, officials reported 39 human cases of avian (H5N1) influenza - compared to just eight cases in 2008, 25 in 2007 and 18 in 2006. Some health officials have raised concerns about the interaction between the avian (H5N1) influenza virus and the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus, which is also established in Egypt. They worry that the (H5N1) virus might acquire genetic properties from the (H1N1) 2009 virus that would allow avian (H5N1) influenza to pass more easily from person to person. However, there is no evidence that such an event is likely.

Outbreaks:

Indonesian Archipelago – Mosquito-borne diseases spreading: Authorities throughout the Indonesian archipelago, including Indonesia, Myanmar, and Malaysia, have announced an increase in the transmission of mosquito-borne illnesses, particularly Chikungunya, Dengue and Malaria. Health authorities in the Sidomulyo area of South Lampung regency, Indonesia reported at least 420 chikungunya (CHK) infections Feb. 1-16, 2010. Mosquitoes that transmit the virus breed rapidly around plantations throughout the regency and infections have spread quickly between communities. Health officials declared an emergency alert due to the size and spread of the outbreak. Health authorities reported over 12,000 CHK infections in Lampung during the second half of December 2009. These cases appeared to be most concentrated in the regencies of West Lampung, Tulangbawang and Mesuji. However, health authorities stress that many victims of the disease remain undiagnosed and that the infection area is most likely much greater. The Malaysian Ministry of Health warned Feb. 13 that dengue fever rates continue to cause alarm. Officials confirmed more than 1,100 dengue cases Jan. 31-Feb. 6, bringing the 2010 total to over 5,200 dengue cases and 14 related deaths. Cases have been highest in Selangor State, but dengue activity continued to increase in Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan, Kelantan, Kedah, Pahang and Perak states, as well as the city of Kuala Lumpur. Health officials reported approximately 41,500 dengue fever infections and 88 associated deaths in Malaysia in 2009. These diseases have been known to cause physical defects beyond simply threatening the victim's life. If left untreated Chikungunya has been known to cause blood disorders and birth defects. World Health Organization officials have stated that the need for resources to support the health apparatus' of these developing states is growing every month.

Special – A/H1N1 - Swine Flu – Updates

Pandemic H1N1 Update: As of February 7, 2010, more than 212 countries and overseas territories have reported laboratory confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza, including at least 15 292 deaths. In most countries within the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere overall pandemic influenza activity continued to decline. The most active areas of transmission, the tropical areas of the southern hemisphere, continue experience high levels of infection and also experience later flu seasons; such areas include: northern Africa, South Asia, and East Asia. Indeed, in temperate regions of the southern hemisphere, sporadic cases of pandemic influenza continued to be reported without evidence of sustained community transmission.

A/H1N1 – Swine Flu Updates – Continued:

Africa: Senegal became the third country within the past month to confirm first cases of pandemic H1N1 2009 in West Africa. It is too early to determine if this heralds the beginning of a period of more widespread transmission in West Africa, which may have been largely spared a significant period of communitywide pandemic influenza virus transmission. In North Africa, transmission persists but substantial declines in activity have been observed over the past month across the region.

Asia: In South and Southeast Asia, including India and Thailand, the pandemic influenza virus continues to circulate widely across the region; however, overall activity continues to decrease or remain low in most places. In China, pandemic and seasonal influenza viruses continue to co-circulate; however, over the last several weeks, seasonal influenza type B viruses have been predominant.

Europe: Although the pandemic influenza virus continues to circulate widely, particularly across central, southern, and Eastern Europe, the overall intensity of pandemic influenza activity has declined substantially.

Americas: Both in the tropical and northern temperate zones, overall pandemic influenza activity continued to decline or remain low in most places. In Central America and the Caribbean, pandemic influenza virus transmission persists but overall activity remains low or unchanged in most places.



From Around the World

Vaccine stabilization system developed: Scientists at Oxford University and Nova Laboratories have found a simple way of keeping vaccines stable, even at tropical temperatures, which could transform immunization campaigns in the developing world. Currently vaccines need to be shipped in a refrigerated container and stored in a fridge or freezer. If you could ship vaccines at normal temperatures, you would greatly reduce cost and hugely improve access to vaccines, especially in remote areas. The research team's method uses a patented system from Nova called HyDRIS and involves mixing the vaccine with the sugars trehalose and sucrose and leaving it to dry out on a filter or membrane. As the water evaporates, the vaccine mixture turns into a syrup and solidifies on the membrane, preserving the active part of the vaccine in a kind of suspended animation and protecting it from harm even at high temperatures. Flushing the membrane with water rehydrates the vaccine in a few seconds, the researchers explained in their study published in the *Science Translational Medicine* journal on February 17. The team stored two different virus-based vaccines on sugar-stabilized membranes for 4 to 6 months at 45 degrees Celsius (113F) with no negative results and also found the vaccines could be kept for a year or more at 37 degrees Celsius with only tiny losses of vaccine. Under the World Health Organization's (WHO) immunization program, nearly 80 percent of children are vaccinated against six killer diseases – polio, diphtheria, tuberculosis, whooping cough, measles and tetanus. But one of the biggest costs of that program is maintaining the so-called "cold chain" – ensuring vaccines are refrigerated all the way from the manufacturer to the child, whether in a developed nation or a remote village in Africa.

From Around the World

International terrorist rankings: The latest international rankings for countries most at risk of experiencing a terrorist attack have been released by Maplecroft Research Group. The rankings are based upon political situation within the country, the presence of domestic and international terrorist groups within the country, and the presence of specific threats to the country's cultural landmarks, including state, military and political infrastructure. The top 10 countries on the list have not varied much from 2009, however Thailand has joined the top 10 for the first time. This development is due to the expansion of civil unrest and growing Muslim insurgency in the south of the country. (1) Iraq; (2) Afghanistan; (3) Pakistan; (4) Somalia; (5) Lebanon; (6) India; (7) Algeria; (8) Columbia; (9) Thailand; (10) the Philippines. Other notable countries' rankings include: (14) Turkey; (15) Russia; (24) Nigeria; (34) Spain; (41) the United Kingdom; (43) China; (46) the United States; (56) France; (81) Germany; (116) Canada; (120) Australia.

A week of festivals throughout the World: Throughout the last week carnivals and other culturally significant public festivals took place all over the globe. All across Latin America the tradition of Carnival was in full swing, from Quito, Ecuador to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In China and Taiwan the Chinese New Years celebrations, honoring the year of the Tiger, continued unabated. In several other south Asian countries, such as Vietnam, the celebration of the Lunar New Year also took place. In Italy the formerly Serene Republic of Venice held its storied festival even as flood waters inched higher. Even in North America the festival season was not ignored; in Quebec City, Canada the winter festival related to Bonhomme began in parks along the banks of the St. Laurence River. While causing travel delays and traffic congestion these events are all highly anticipated tourist attractions that continue to bring joy to the cities and countries that have held them for hundreds of years.

Safety increasing for air travel: Air travel recorded its second safest year in 2009, with one accident for every 1.4 million flights made in Western-built jets compared with one per 1.2 million in 2008, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) stated in a recent press release. According to their data, last year's global accident rate was equal to 0.71 aircraft hulls lost per million flights, an improvement on the 0.81 recorded in 2008, but short of the 2006 record of 0.65. IATA said the 2009 rate was a 36 percent improvement on 2000 levels. "Having made aviation the safest way to travel, further improvements will come only with careful data analysis," said IATA Director-General Giovanni Bisignani. Bisignani said the industry had improved its safety record in a decade when airlines together lost an average \$5 billion a year. IATA, which groups about 230 airlines, said 2.3 billion people flew safely on 35 million flights in 2009. This last year saw 19 accidents involving Western-built jets, compared to 22 in 2008, and 90 accidents for all types of jets – both eastern and western – against 109 the year before. Of this year's accidents, 18 involving all aircraft types resulted in deaths against 23 in 2008; however, total deaths rose to 685 from 502.

Our Environment

Severe droughts causing international water woes: All over the globe major water shortages are threatening large areas of human settlement. In India and central Asia natural aquifers, supplied by the Himalayan glaciers have grown noticeably smaller over the past two-decades. In North America, large rivers, such as the Colorado River in the United States, and the massive central plains aquifer have begun to supply increasingly less water for human consumption. Indeed, even developed countries have no real plan for the growing water shortage. Nowhere is the threat of drought more pronounced than on small island countries in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. The Caribbean island of St Lucia is currently preparing to proclaim a water emergency in light of the current severe drought conditions, BBC Caribbean reports. Officials at the state-run Water & Sewerage Company (WASCO) said that they are also considering taking further steps to address the crisis and could start importing water from the neighboring island of Dominica. They are also trying to import desalination equipment from other islands in the region. The drought, which has also affected other countries in Central America and the Caribbean region, is also hampering the ability of the St Lucian authorities to cope with forest fires. This worsening situation is possibly the most destructive issue facing the World today.

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