

Volume 6 – No. 15
March 30 – April 5, 2010

Health & Travel security Insights from around the five continents

North America

March 30

United States – Lyme disease: State health officials are taking a closer look at a possible Lyme disease outbreak after several people complained of Lyme disease symptoms in Lehi, Utah.

March 31

Canada – Measles outbreak: The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control warned health-care professionals and the public to be alert for measles after nearly a dozen people in Metro Vancouver were recently diagnosed with the disease. Ten laboratory-confirmed and four suspect cases of measles were identified in the past two weeks, including an out-of-province visitor.

Canada – C. difficile outbreak: There is another outbreak of Clostridium difficile at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital (British Columbia). Over the last week, the hospital recorded six new cases of C. difficile. The hospital saw eight new cases per month in both the January and February reporting periods.

United States – Major flooding in Northeast: Flooding on a scale rarely seen in New England forced hundreds of people from their homes, overwhelming sewage systems to the point that families were asked to stop flushing toilets and washing out bridges and highways from Maine to Connecticut. Hardest hit by three days of record-breaking rain was Rhode Island, where the worst flooding in 200 years persisted for days and permanently closed businesses already struggling in the weak economy. A stretch of Interstate 95, the main route linking Boston to New York, was closed in Rhode Island. Amtrak suspended some trains in the area because of water over the tracks; it also said its Acela Express service between New Haven, Conn., and Boston and its Northeast regional service between New York and Boston would be suspended for several days. Rescues continue to be reported along the Pawtuxet River, which flooded several blocks past its banks in many spots.

April 1

Canada – Ephedrine product warning: An unauthorized "fat burner" sold online can pose serious health risks, Health Canada warned. West Pharm Therma Lean Fat Burner Energizer contains ephedrine and caffeine. Combined together, they pose serious and possibly fatal adverse effects if taken under certain circumstances.

United States – Travel disruption: A nuclear security summit will be held April 12-13 in the capital Washington DC. The airspace over the city will be restricted between 08:00 and 22:00 (local time) for the two days; the no-fly zone includes a 35-mile (56km) radius around the capital's Ronald Reagan National Airport. Flights can arrive at and depart from the city's other airports – Washington Dulles International Airport, Baltimore's Washington International Airport, and Manassas Regional Airport, in the state of Virginia. Increased security will significantly inhibit travel around the capital and may cause flight delays.

April 5

Canada – Cheese products recalled: The public is being warned not to eat Silani-brand Mozzarella Cheese distributed in Ontario and Quebec because it may be contaminated with listeria monocytogenes. It is sold in 340-gram packages, and a best-before date of 2011 MR 01.

South America

March 29

Argentina – Tourists turned away from Iguazu Falls: National park employees demanding salary increases staged a surprise blockade at the Argentine entrance to Iguazu Falls, a popular tourist destination located at the juncture between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Over 4,000 tourists were turned away. The blockade may impact another 40,000 tourists who planned to visit the site during the Holy Week and Easter holidays. The falls may still be accessed from Ciudad del Este in Paraguay and Foz do Iguacu in Brazil.

Brazil – Dengue fever epidemic: At least 5,159 people have been infected and over 20 have died since the beginning of the year as the dengue epidemic spreads. Principal cities in the affected region include Large Beach, Cubatão, Santos, Saint Vincent, and Guarujá.

March 30

Honduras – Murder rate climbs: Honduras has the highest murder rate in Central America, according to the country's commissioner for human rights. Last year, Honduras registered a murder rate of 66.8 for every 100,000 inhabitants, a notable increase in recent years. In 2006, Honduras had the third highest homicide rate in the region with 46.2 murders for every 100,000 inhabitants, behind Guatemala with 47 and El Salvador with 65 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. Two years later, the murder rate in Honduras increased to 57.9 for every 100,000 inhabitants, more than El Salvador (52), Guatemala (48).

Mexico – Increased violence: Dozens of gunmen mounted rare and apparently coordinated attacks, targeting two army garrisons in the border states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, touching off firefights that killed 18 attackers. Gunmen staged seven separate attacks on the army, including three blockades, marking a serious escalation in the drug war. Cartel gunmen attacked in unit-size forces armed with bulletproof vehicles, dozens of hand grenades and assault rifles. Gunmen erected blockades, using buses and trucks, on several major streets from 10.00 (local time), barring access to the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, among other locations; Boulevard Morelos, a major thoroughfare in the east of the city, and Mexico Highway 2, which connects Reynosa to Rio Bravo (Texas state, US), were also affected.

April 1

Venezuela – Airport road warning: Travelers are reminded of the ongoing security concerns on the Caracas-La Guaira highway, en-route to the Caracas Maiquetia International Airport. This highway is known to be particularly dangerous, and highway robberies occur at any time of the day and at any place along the highway. The general modus operandi of the criminals is to cause a roadblock with either trash and debris or vehicles, particularly at chokepoints at the tunnels on the highway. Once traffic has stopped, travelers are robbed and/or carjacked, often at gunpoint. There are also credible reports of arriving travelers being targeted in the airport, to be later robbed along the highway en route to Caracas.

Venezuela – Kidnappings rising: Several kidnappings took place in Maracaibo over the last week, the state of Zulia's capital, and Colon, located 187 km (116 miles) southeast of Maracaibo. There have been 30 kidnappings in Zulia State in 2010, a 59-percent increase compared to the same time period in 2009. Kidnapping remains a threat in Venezuela and violent crime has steadily increased during the past few years. Although the rate of violent crime and increasing poverty leave anyone at risk for kidnapping, business leaders, prominent media figures and foreign nationals may be at a greater risk.

April 2

Mexico – Electrical workers on indefinite strike: Members of the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union (SME) staged a peaceful demonstration at the Zócalo (Constitution Square) in the capital Mexico City. The union says it will stage a mass hunger strike at the Zócalo as well as further demonstrations in the coming weeks; a tentative date of 1 May has been set for a rally.

Peru – Machu Picchu reopens: Authorities reopened the pre-Columbian Inca site Machu Picchu, a UNESCO World Heritage site situated in the southern department of Cusco. PeruRail and Inca Rail have partially restored rail services between the citadel and Piscacucho (Cusco), which were suspended in January following a period of heavy rain and mudslides.

April 4

Mexico – Large quake rattles Baha: Roads were torn up, buildings cracked and electricity posts toppled after a 7.2 magnitude earthquake shook cities in northern Mexico and Southern California. Two deaths and 100 wounded have been reported. The relatively shallow quake was centered in a lightly populated area in northeastern Baja California. For several hours a series of aftershocks rocked the area around the epicenter, 30 miles (50 km) southeast of Mexicali. A major highway connecting Mexicali with Tijuana on the Pacific coast was badly damaged across the border in the U.S. town of Calexico, eight downtown blocks were closed off with Border Patrol agents helping police to secure the area against looters.

Peru – Miners on indefinite strike: The government declared a state of emergency in the southern provinces of Nazca, Palpa, San Juan de Marcona (Ica department), Tambopata, Manu (Madre de Dios department), Caraveli and Camana (Arequipa department). The move comes in front of an indefinite nationwide strike by members of the National Federation of Artisanal Miners of Peru (FENAMARPE) and the Mining Federation of Madre de Dios. The Native Federation of Madre de Dios River and Tributaries (FENAMAD) has also extended its support to the forthcoming work stoppage. The state of emergency will last for 60 days and entails restrictions on freedom of assembly and movement in the affected regions.

Europe

March 30

France – Nationwide rail strike: Unions representing employees of the national rail operators Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer (SNCF) have called for a 24-hour strike on April 6. In addition, railway ticket office employees will stage a 24-hour work stoppage on April 8.

France – Corsica ferry service on strike: Workers employed with ferry operators Société Nationale Corse Méditerranée and Compagnie Méridionale de Navigation will commence an indefinite strike April 1 over a decision to allow an Italian operator to enter the sector.

United Kingdom – Norovirus outbreak: More than 100 operations have been cancelled at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital as staff there continues to battle a norovirus outbreak.

Europe – Airlines banned: EU officials announced that all airlines based in Sudan and the Philippines, as well as Iran Air, will be banned from flying to member nations' airports because of safety concerns. The restrictions partially ban Iran Air, 40 airlines in the Philippines, and 12 airlines in Sudan from operating flights into the 27 EU member states. Aviation authorities stated that the airlines covered by the ban will not be allowed to fly into EU airports because of "serious and persistent non-compliance" of civil aviation safety checks on passenger aircraft. Although airlines from the Philippines and Sudan have periodically operated passenger flights into EU countries, no airlines from either country currently have regularly scheduled direct flights into any of the member nations. Iran Air will be allowed to operate with certain up-to-date aircraft into Europe, but much of the airline's outdated passenger aircraft fleet will be restricted.

March 31

Netherlands – Q-fever outbreak: A rare disease that normally only strikes farm animals and those who work closely with them has now infected hundreds of people who have had no contact with farms. A handful of those infected with Q-fever, a bacterial infection transmitted by livestock, have died, some have been sick for months and most have come down with flu-like symptoms or pneumonia for a few weeks. The number of Q-fever cases who have had no contact with farms, however, has grown to more than 2,000 last year from only 200 three years ago.

Russia – Suicide bombings: At least 50 people have been killed and more than 100 wounded over the past three days by suicide bombers who detonated explosives on packed Moscow metro trains and near a school in the southern region of Dagestan. Dagestan is in one of the most turbulent regions of the North Caucasus and the recent bombings underline the growing Islamist insurgency along Russia's southern flank. Russia has increased security at airports, train stations and across the North Caucasus. A video released by the Caucasus Emirate group promised further attacks.

United Kingdom – Cheese recall: Cheeses produced at Wester Lawrenceton Farm in Moray have been recalled after they were found to be contaminated with bacteria which cause food poisoning. The alert was issued after tests found some of the Carola and Caerphilly cheeses had been contaminated with listeria, a bacterium which causes food poisoning.

April 1

Romania – Public transport strike: Extensive traffic disruptions occurred throughout the city of Bucharest after public transportation workers staged a spontaneous strike over salary cuts. Up to 4,000 trolley, bus and tram drivers participated in the work stoppage. The northern parts of the capital were the most significantly impacted although the Metro system continued running.

April 2

Hungary – Malev flights disruption: Pilots employed by flag carrier Malév and affiliated with the Hungarian Airlines Pilots' Association (HUNALPA) on 31 March threatened to observe industrial action in April following a disagreement over labor contract negotiations. No date has yet been specified for the strike.

April 5

Czech Republic – Increased security: U.S. president Barack Obama will visit the city of Prague on April 8 to sign a nuclear arms treaty with Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. On the following day, Obama is scheduled to meet several central and eastern European leaders in the city to discuss security issues. The meetings will be held amid heightened security measures in the capital; around 1,000 police officers and specially trained bodyguards will be deployed in and around the summit venue, an undisclosed luxury hotel in the city, as well as in the city's subway.

Russia – Increased tension in Caucasus: Eight compartments of a cargo train were derailed following an explosion at around 03.50 (local time) on a railway line near Inchkhe station, in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan's Karabudakhkentsky district. No casualties were reported in the attack, which destroyed a section of the track. The train was en-route to the capital Moscow from Baku (Azerbaijan). Robust security measures, including checkpoints, can be anticipated across the region. Counter-insurgency operations against militant separatist groups will continue in the North Caucasus, raising the possibility of retaliatory attacks and further associated armed engagements between the security forces and suspected militants, both of which pose persistent indirect risks to bystanders.

Middle East & Asia / Pacific

March 30

Australia – Blue-green algae warning: The blue-green algae alert in the Murray River remains in place upstream of Mildura, despite the outbreak easing in other sections of the river.

India – Communal violence: The government deployed approximately 1,800 paramilitary troops to Hyderabad, the capital of the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, following two days of clashes between members of the Hindu and Muslim communities. The authorities also imposed an indefinite curfew in the southern zone of the Old City after at least one person was killed in fresh violence in the Shah Ali Banda area. Orders of “shoot-on-sight” were given when crowds did not disperse. In addition, unrest was reported in several other parts of the city, including Moghalpura, Sultan Shahi, Kandikal Gate, Hari Bowli, Yakutpura and Kurmaguda. Yesterday, at least 36 people were injured in clashes in the Siddiamber Bazaar, Afzalgunj, Gowliguda, Begum Bazaar, Kalapathar, Chatrinaka, Shah-ali Banda, Puranapul and Kalapathar areas of the city. Heightened security measures, including banning the assembly of five or more people, were subsequently imposed and remain in effect in the southern and the western zones of the city. The curfew was lifted on April 1, although additional security forces remain in the city.

Vietnam – Toxic candy: The Vietnamese Ministry of Health’s Food Hygiene and Safety Department has ordered local authorities to withdraw lollipops with fluorescent sticks that are popular among children in the country. The order was made after tests conducted by the department showed that the candy’s sticks contained two toxic chemicals which can cause cancer or gene mutation in humans.

March 31

China – Toxic vegetables: Checks for toxic vegetables continued in southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region after 9,610 kg of vegetables sold in the region had excessive pesticide residues. It is believed that a pronounced drought in the region has led to lax compulsory testing.

French Polynesia – Airport strike: Three unions representing employees at Faa'a International Airport, located on the main island of Tahiti, commenced an indefinite strike. The work stoppage has resulted in the cancellation of at least one international flight; domestic flights have not been affected so far.

New Zealand – Measles outbreak: Health officials fear an outbreak of measles in a small community in the far north has made its way to Wellington. So far, 30 cases of measles have been discovered in one large extended family in the Hokianga, who did not believe in vaccination.

April 1

Australia – Ross River virus alert: Southside residents have been warned to step up mosquito control after recent rains have sparked a surge in Ross River virus cases. According to Queensland Health, there were 13 Ross River virus diagnoses in the Brisbane South area in the eight weeks to March 15. More than 60 cases of the mosquito-borne virus were reported across the state last week. Residents should take preventative measures such as covering rainwater tank inlets, unclogging gutters and wading pools, and emptying water from pot plants.

Japan – Chugoku Electric to halt nuclear reactor: Chugoku Electric Power Co. said it will suspend operations at a nuclear power reactor in western Japan due to lax regular inspections. The company said it has found at least 123 cases of flawed inspections in total at the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at its Shimane nuclear power station in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture. The company found some suspected cases in which no checks have been made since the plant went into operation in 1974.

April 1

Taiwan – Rally turns violent: Protesters clashed with police officers in Taoyuan during trade talks between Taipei and Beijing. According to reports, dozens of protesters gathered near the hotel where the officials were meeting to express their concern about the warming relations between the two countries and the potential pact, known as the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), which emphasizes industrial exchanges between China and Taiwan. Police officers erected a barricade to prevent the protesters from entering the venue and minor scuffles were reported.

April 2

China – Vaccine recalled: China will step up monitoring of a faulty rabies vaccine that has been recalled but may still be on the market, the country's Food and Drug Administration said. Although the vaccine was recalled and production shut down late last year, China's lax regulatory environment means doses of the vaccine may still be available. The administration also said it was watching for any reactions in people who took the vaccine last year. It is the latest in a series of quality problems in China in recent years, including tainted infant formula and other milk products that sickened children.

Vietnam – Rise in dengue fever cases: Vietnam's Ministry of Health reported an increase in dengue fever cases in Vietnam's central and northern cities. In the country's central city of Danang, about 600 people were infected with the disease in the first three months of this year, about 10 times higher than the figure in the same period last year. Meanwhile, the northern capital city of Hanoi reported nearly 100 patients with one fatality, said Le Duc Tuyen, Director of the Hanoi Preventive Health Centre's Disease Control Department. In the first three months of this year, there were 7,300 dengue fever cases across Vietnam.

April 5

China (Hong Kong) – Cathay Pacific to strike: Cathay Pacific cabin crew threatened to strike April 6 over a wage dispute. Negotiations between the management and the FAU are under way and the airline is confident that a strike will be averted. Should a strike go ahead, considerable disruption to Cathay Pacific flights to and from Hong Kong International Airport can be expected; it is also likely to result in an increased demand for alternative airlines. In addition, the impact of any work stoppages by cabin crew on travelers is unlikely to be confined to the duration of the strike, and residual disruption should be expected even after the employees resume their duties.

Egypt – Rally in Cairo: The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information will rally on April 6 in Cairo to call for an end to emergency measures. The planned march will commence from Tahrir Square and pass through Qasr al-Ainy Street before concluding at the parliament building on Majlis al-Shaab Street, where the protesters intend to submit a letter to MPs urging them to vote against extending the state of emergency.

Africa

March 30

Central African Republic – Presidential election postponed: State radio announced that President Francois Bozizé had accepted the postponement of presidential elections, previously scheduled for April 25. Bozizé had earlier dismissed appeals from aid agencies and the independent election commission for a technical delay due to a lack of preparation, stating that it would be unconstitutional.

March 30

Kenya – Heavy rain and flooding: Heavy rainfall over the past few days has caused severe flooding that has killed at least seven people and caused significant disruption to road travel in the Western, Rift Valley and Nyanza provinces. The Rift Valley districts of Nakuru, Turkana, Pokot Central, Marigat and Keiyo have been particularly affected. The Wei Wei and Kawalase rivers in the Rift Valley have burst their banks, prompting the authorities to evacuate the area; more than 300 people have been displaced due to floods in Marigat. Conditions are unlikely to improve significantly over the coming days as meteorologists have forecast further rain in the affected provinces.

Libya – New visa regulation: Authorities lifted a visa ban on citizens of European Union member states that are signatories to the Schengen treaty. The move came after Switzerland ended its travel ban on 188 Libyan nationals, including family members of ruler Col Muammar al-Gadhafi and leading officials.

Rwanda – Increased security: Several rallies and commemorative events will be held across the country from April 1 to 7 as part of the 16th annual week of national mourning to observe the 1994 genocide of the ethnic Tutsi minority. The main ceremonies will take place in the town of Murambi (Southern province). Heightened security and travel disruption should be anticipated in the vicinity of the Murambi genocide memorial site (Nyamagabe district), as well as the Gisozi Genocide Memorial in the capital Kigali.

South Africa – Transport strikes: Striking toll-booth workers on the N4 highway, which connects the country's western and eastern coasts, burned tires and blocked the highway with debris near Pretoria, disrupting traffic near the Diamond Hill toll plaza. Trans African Concessions (TRAC), which operates toll booths on the N4, stated that it has implemented measures to minimise disruption on the highway, and claims that all load control centres and plazas will function as normal during the continuing industrial action. In Cape Town, some Metrorail employees commenced a work stoppage, but there have been no reports of service interruption.

March 31

Côte d'Ivoire – Increased tension: Defense minister Michel Amani N'Guessan demanded the disarmament of former rebels prior to presidential elections scheduled to take place in late April or early May. The move comes after supporters of President Laurent Gbagbo expressed concern that the polls may be postponed again after a leader of the former rebel group New Forces (FN) and Prime Minister Guillaume Soro refused to link the completion of the rebels' disarmament with the confirmation of an election date. The demand will increase tensions between the government and the rebel leadership and is likely to further destabilise the fragile political environment ahead of the election. Heightened security measures have already been put in place in the capital Yamoussoukro, the city of Abidjan (Lagunes region), the opposition stronghold of Bouaké (Vallée du Bandama region) and Gagnoa (Fromager region) following the earlier unrest.

Zimbabwe – Measles outbreak: Health authorities said that more than 183 people have died, mainly children, from a measles outbreak that has spread across the country.

April 1

Guinea-Bissau – Increased security measures: Many military offices remain in custody as fears continue to spread of a possible coup attempt. No violence has been reported in Bissau, though hundreds of supporters gathered before the prime minister's office in the capital to protest. The latest developments underscore the persistent volatility of the security situation in the country; heightened security arrangements, including increased checkpoints, can be expected. However, any widespread civil unrest seems unlikely at this stage; the detention is not actually believed to have been a coup attempt.

Nigeria – Meningitis outbreak: At least hundred persons have died in the last days due to an outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis in the North-East of Nigeria.

April 1

South Africa – Rift Valley fever: Three more people have been infected with Rift Valley Fever (RVF), bringing the confirmed number of cases to 69. Two people, both from Free State, have died from the disease since the first incident was reported on February 13. RVF is a viral disease that can cause severe symptoms in a low proportion of infected humans. The virus is transmitted by mosquitoes.

April 2

Uganda – Strange disease: Experts from the Ministry of Health in Kampala are in Mityana district to investigate a strange disease that has reportedly hit the area. The disease, which is reported to have symptoms similar to that of Ebola, broke out in Mityana north last week. Two people and seven children are reportedly ill suffering from vomiting and diarrhea.

H5N1 - Avian Influenza Updates

Outbreak in birds:

Romania: in the village Plaur, in the southeastern Romanian county of Tulcea.

Human cases:

Egypt: A 30 year-old female from Damietta district, Damietta Governorate has been confirmed to have avian flu, the 18th case of 2010. She was admitted to hospital last week, where she received oseltamivir treatment. She is in a critical condition. Investigations into the source of infection indicated exposure to sick and dead poultry.

Special – A/H1N1 - Swine Flu – Updates

USA - CDC sees sustained A/H1N1 activity in Southeast: Flu indicators are showing signs of increased and sustained pandemic flu activity in some Southeastern states, though rates remain steady at the national level, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC report has tracked closely with media reports of a rise in flu hospitalizations in Georgia and a rise in flu-like illnesses in Louisiana and surrounding states. The report of increased activity in the southeast US is also consistent with regional flu activity at college campuses in the region reported by the American College Health Association. Three of the CDC's 10 regions reported increases in doctors visits for flu-like illnesses; the affected region includes Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska; and the area that covers Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada. No states are reporting widespread flu activity, and only three - Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina - are reporting regional activity. Local activity was reported by Puerto Rico and eight states: Arkansas, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Some Southeastern states are reporting recent increases in flu-related hospitalization, though very few hospitalizations involving lab-confirmed pandemic A/H1N1 were reported in the rest of the nation.

United States - Much of unused H1N1 vaccine almost expired: Nearly half the 162 million doses of H1N1 vaccine produced to fight the deadly flu in the United States have gone unused, and some batches have either expired or are nearing their expiration date. In Pennsylvania, some 4.6 million doses of H1N1 vaccine have been distributed, but state officials say they don't know how many were administered, how many are still available or how many have expired. They do know that more than 683,575 doses were sent to health department district offices and the 60 state health centers. Of those, 26,897 doses have been thrown out because they expired. Overall an estimated 800,000 doses were recalled because they didn't meet potency standards.



From Around the World

Islamist insurgency growing in Russia: Over the past year and a half, our newsletter has documented the growing intensity of the Islamic insurgency in the Russian controlled Caucasus region. What originated as a relatively isolated, albeit extremely violent and effective militant rebellion in the state of Chechnya has developed into a regional phenomenon, one capable of dragging the entire Caucasus region into outright war. This region specifically includes the Russian controlled areas of Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya and the countries of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia. However, other former Soviet territories, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, are already suffering from indigenous Islamic terrorist organizations that receive international funding and support. These organizations are already suspected of having established relationships with the terrorist groups operating on Russian territory, adding to the capabilities of both groups. The attacks that were perpetrated this week on the Moscow subway were physically committed by two female Chechen terrorist operatives, who detonated their explosives almost simultaneously in two separate areas of the city. Following the blasts, more explosions were detonated days later in Russian territory in the Caucasus. The frequency and organized nature of these attacks demonstrates the organized capacity of the militants. Such deadly capacity should not be seen as an isolated incident, but part of a growing and disturbing pattern. Chechen militants have launched several high-profile attacks throughout Russia, including blowing up apartment complexes in Moscow in the 1990's and taking hundreds of children hostage in the Beslan hostage crisis of 2006. Although the militant movement in Chechnya proper has suffered from recent attacks on its leadership by Russian security forces over the past three years, during this time there has been a marked increase in the frequency and scope of attacks by Islamic terrorists. The militants' strategy has been altered from outright military confrontation to clandestine terrorist operations. The Moscow subway attacks were claimed by a Chechen terrorist, known as Umarov, who has seemingly taken on the leadership of Chechen independence struggle. What has complicated the conflict for both the original surviving Chechen militants and Russian security forces is that Umarov's campaign is now directed towards "the freedom of all Muslims within Russia." And, it should also be noted, there may be several terrorist groups operating against Russia, with Umarov only representing one faction. The situation is also worsened by the growing connection between central Asian and north Caucasian terrorist groups and drug trafficking. In a situation reminiscent of the Taliban's reliance upon drug profits in Afghanistan to finance their war against NATO troops, the indigenous terrorist organizations of central Asia routinely sell and transport vast quantities of illicit narcotics into Russia, particularly heroin, helping to fuel a serious heroin and opiate addiction crisis in Russia's northern cities. Therefore, what has emerged in Russia is a growing, more diverse terrorist movement that is fuelled by growing drug profits and enjoys increasing international relationships with other capable Islamic militant groups. It remains to be seen, despite the blustering of Putin and Medvedev, whether Russian security forces and the Russian people are ready for the type of violent and lengthy campaign that may be required to defeat or neutralize this insurgency. What can be expected are further attacks against civilians by both sides as the militants seek to destroy the Russian public's desire to fight, which they succeeded in doing in 1995, and a heavy response by Russia security forces.



From Around the World

Smoking linked to serious eye disease: Smoking is already a known risk factor for age-related macular degeneration, cataract and thyroid eye disease. Now, the first study to specifically examine the impact of smoking on uveitis - inflammation of the eye's middle layer of tissue - indicates that tobacco smoke likely plays a role in this serious eye disease as well. In the United States about 10 percent of blindness is caused by uveitis. Researchers analyzed medical records for smoking status and the type and cause of inflammation for all uveitis clinic patients seen at the University of California, San Francisco's F.I. Proctor Foundation between 2002 and 2009. Results for this patient group were compared with a matched control group and the data were adjusted for differences in age, race, gender, and median income. Smokers were 2.2 times more likely to have uveitis than those who had never smoked. A particularly strong relationship was found between smoking and inflammatory central macular edema (swelling of the central area of the retina) in patients with certain types of uveitis. Cigarette smoke includes compounds that stimulate inflammation within the blood vessels, and this may contribute to immune system disruption and uveitis, the researchers stated. Uveitis can harm important structures like the iris in the front of the eye, and the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye where images are focused and relayed to the optic nerve. The condition can develop in people with systemic diseases such as multiple sclerosis or juvenile arthritis or be part of the body's response to an infection like herpes simplex or tuberculosis. Often, though, uveitis has no apparent cause.

Recalls raise additive concerns: As the list of products being recalled due to possible salmonella contamination continues to grow, so does the number of questions over the food additive at the centre of the controversy. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has added La Cocina cheese-flavored tortilla chips and Grandma Emily's BBQ Lounge Mix, to the dozens of items already being recalled over fears that an additive used to enhance flavor, hydrolyzed vegetable protein (HVP), may contain salmonella. The agency also expanded a recall of Frontier whole black peppercorn packages. The HVP was manufactured by Basic Food Flavors Inc., based in Las Vegas. Nearly 100 products have already been subject to recall in Canada, including potato chips, flavored peanuts and spinach dip. More than 100 products have been recalled in the United States. HVP is added in dry powder and paste forms to a wide variety of packaged and processed foods, including soups, flavored snacks and sauces. Manufacturers aren't required to list HVP as an ingredient if it was added to the food product as part of another ingredient. For the growing contingent of label-reading Canadians, the recall has created new concern over the sanctity of the country's food supply. Food additives, as well as preservatives and flavors, have come under increasing fire from critics who advocate for a return to basic, simple ingredients and unprocessed food. There is good reason to be health-conscious and avoid preservatives such as monosodium glutamate. "Mistakes have been made, both in additives other food processing interventions," Dr. Hill said. But processed chemicals in added ingredients are more common than many people realize, and are often necessary to make certain products available. For instance, baking powder is a chemical leavening agent. Soybeans need to be processed in order for people to digest them properly and receive their nutrients. And while it's nice to imagine growing food in a backyard garden, the process of picking and preparing can cause some vegetables to lose their nutritional value, Dr. Hill said. The cold winter season also means many of those items simply aren't available for large chunks of the year. While officials are still investigating the source of the problem, one food scientist said he believes it may have been caused by unsanitary conditions at the plant where HVP is manufactured. Clair Hicks, a food science professor at the University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture, and a spokesperson for the Institute of Food Technologists said the protein source and processing method don't create risks of bacterial contamination and that it seems more likely that improper cleaning or sanitation methods are at the root of the problem.

Our Environment

New radioactive isotope found at Vermont Yankee: Heightened levels of cesium-137 were found this week 15 feet below the surface, near the source of a tritium leak at the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. This data suggests that cesium — a more dangerous radioactive isotope — also might have come from the tritium leak, according to state radiological health chief William Irwin. Vermont Yankee officials disagree, contending that the cesium finding was consistent with what would have been in the soil for decades and ended up at that depth after the ground was disturbed, Vermont Yankee spokesman Larry Smith said. Irwin reported that the concentration of the cesium — three to 12 times greater than was found at the Chernobyl 1986 nuclear accident in the Ukraine — was unexpected. "We're kind of questioning why the cesium is there in these concentrations," he said. "To me, that means it's coming from the plant and probably from the leak. It's just a hypothesis." Irwin also reported Monday that a somewhat heightened level of tritium had been found in a monitoring well where he hadn't expected it, north of the concentration of tritium that has spread from a leak reported in January. He said Monday that a well labeled "GZ-13D" tested unexpectedly positive for tritium at 1,060 picocuries per liter. Previously, GZ-13D tested below the lower limit of detection.

Your Healthy Column – Gout & Heart disease

Gout increases heart attack risk in women: Women with gout have a 40 percent increased risk of fatal and non-fatal heart attacks compared to women without the disease, a new British Columbia study says. By comparison, men with gout only have an 11 percent greater risk of heart attacks, according to the study in the British Medical Journal's *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*. The study is said to be the first to document the link between heart attacks in women and gout, since previous research was limited to men. Scientists with the Vancouver-based Arthritis Research Centre of Canada used the B.C. Linked Health Database, a resource containing data on doctor visits, hospitalizations and drug prescriptions covering the whole province. They identified nearly 10,000 residents of B.C. over 65 who had a diagnosis of gout and compared them with just over 48,000 without one. Gout is a form of arthritis marked by joint inflammation and pain. It affects about nine per cent of men and six per cent of women over 65 but the new study indicates the cardiovascular risk associated with gout may be much more serious in women. Gout is caused by deposits of crystals in the joints stemming from high levels of uric acid in the blood when the kidneys fail to eliminate enough of it. Alcohol and diets rich in meats and low in dairy are known to aggravate the condition. Gout typically starts in middle age and often affects joints in the feet, particularly the base of the big toe.

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