

1. UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA?

After years of debate, South Africa could soon be implementing an overhaul of its current healthcare system, bringing universal coverage to all. This proposed scheme, 70 years in the making, would bring free primary health-care to its citizens, 84% of whom do not have health insurance. If implemented, this plan would cost \$18.3 billion over the course of 14 years.

3. INDIGENOUS HEALTH CONCERNS

In light of the high rates of lung and cervical cancer amongst indigenous peoples in Canada, United States, Australia, and New Zealand, the World Health Organization has acknowledged the need for improvements in the current cancer screening and prevention program for Indigenous peoples. Across developed countries, the Indigenous population has a history of relatively poor health outcomes and shorter life expectancies.



TAKING THE PULSE AROUND THE WORLD MEDPULSE

2. SUNSCREEN THREATS

New research attributes the degradation of coral reefs to oxybenzone, a primary component of most sunscreens. This disruption of the ecosystem has downstream effects on the human diet, posing a potential health hazard.

4. POTENTIAL EBOLA CURE

Development of the compound, GS-573, can result in the production of the first licensed drug against the Ebola virus. In a treatment administered to monkeys 3 days after being infected with the virus, a 100% survival rate was recorded. The 2014 Ebola outbreak, still ongoing in parts of West Africa, has resulted in 28,502 reported cases and 11,312 deaths.

5. HIV VACCINE ON THE HORIZON?

A potential HIV vaccine is soon entering clinical trials, projected to take one year for completion. This vaccine is unique in its ability to target the virus at the point of infection, thus allowing it to neutralize multiple strains of the virus. Previous candidate vaccines have only been effective against specific strains.

7. EL NIÑO PREDICTIONS PROMPT PREPARATION

The Climate Prediction Centre and International Research Institute for Climate and Society have published data predicting the occurrence of an unusually strong El Niño this year. El Niño is associated with a warm band of oscillating ocean water, causing short-term weather changes including heavier rainfall in Africa. This has been linked to an increase in the incidence of Rift Valley fever, prompting a need for urgent public education and safety measures.

10. VACCINE-DERIVED POLIOVIRUS

An 8-year-old boy was paralyzed and later died from oral vaccine-derived poliovirus. This type of infection occurs in areas with low vaccination coverage and poor sanitation, which allows for mutation of the polio viral genome. Subsequent infection by the mutated virus can lead to paralysis. Along with the reappearance of polio in Ukraine and Mali, this case has sparked public health concerns.



6. NOBEL PRIZE IN MEDICINE

The 2015 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to three recipients for their research involving parasitic diseases. The accolade was given to William Campbell and Satoshi Omura for their discovery of a novel therapy to combat roundworm infections, and Tu Youyou for her discovery of a novel treatment for malaria.

8. INDIA'S FROTHY TOXIC FOAM

The streets of Bangalore have been flooded with flammable, foam clouds that have formed as a result of sewage and chemical waste pollution in the nearby Bellandur Lake. The waste builds up under the surface of the water, and toxic clouds are formed when the lake is disrupted by rainfall. Awareness efforts have been implemented to save the integrity of the lake.

9. CHINA'S SMOKING "EPIDEMIC"

A study conducted by researchers at Oxford University has warned that a third of Chinese men currently under the age of 20 may die prematurely from the effects of smoking. In 2010, around one million people in China died because of tobacco usage. If current trends persist, it is said that the mortality rate will double by 2030.