



# PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY

BRINGING YOU CURRENT NEWS ON GLOBAL HEALTH & ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS

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## WHY IS IT SO HARD TO BELIEVE IN CLIMATE CHANGE?

Scientific knowledge is usually presented as though it were factual, or objective. And so we are shocked when it is revealed that scientists, like the rest of us, argue and debate the possible interpretations of data, using bits and pieces of theory to support different relative weights for different interpretations of the evidence. The ‘climategate’ saga of 2009 concerning the emails sent between scientists on the intergovernmental panel on climate change is a case in point.

[Read More on WE Forum](#)



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## CHINA’S CRAZY PLAN TO KEEP SAND FROM SWALLOWING THE WORLD

By 2000, Duolun was up to 87 percent desert, fueling sandstorms that regularly engulfed Beijing to the south. The situation was so dire that then-Premier Zhu Rongji visited Duolun and declared, “It is imperative to build green barriers.” And build they did. Since Zhu’s pronouncement, millions of pines have been planted over a total of nearly 200,000 acres, with more going in every spring. According to official statistics, 31 percent of Duolun is now forested.

[Read More on World ENews](#)





## IS ZIKA GONE FOR GOOD?

While the spectre of Zika in the Americas is fading, it's wise to stay vigilant. Some experts worry that new cases of Zika recently reported in northern Mexico could presage another outbreak, with subsequent spread to U.S. border states. Relying on herd immunity is shortsighted, since over time fewer people will be infected and the virus can gain a new foothold. Indeed, the geographic distribution of the mosquito species that transmits Zika, is expanding. The insect is infesting unexpected parts of North America and Europe. The definitive solution to prevent a return of the Zika epidemic is, of course, a broadly protective vaccine.

[Read More on The New Yorker](#)

## MEASLES VACCINE: SOME DEVELOPED COUNTRIES SHOULD TARGET ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS

A new study by Bocconi University in Italy and Bruno Kessler Foundation analyzing nine countries (Australia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ireland, Italy, South Korea, Singapore, the UK and the US) and published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, highlights the role played by demographics in the spread of measles and concludes that future vaccination strategies in high-fertility countries should focus on increasing childhood immunization rates, while immunization campaigns targeting adolescents and young adults are required in low fertility countries. Using a transmission model calibrated on historical serological data the authors estimate that the susceptible proportion of the population (i.e. unprotected against the infection) varies from ca. 3% in the UK to more than 12.5% in Ethiopia.

[Read More on Science Daily](#)



## AMBITIOUS INITIATIVE TO BRIDGE LATIN AMERICA TO GLOBAL INNOVATIONS

A new two-year programme is poised to change the face of contraceptive access in twelve countries in LAC. The Coalition's Regional Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean (ForoLAC) has embarked on a pioneering initiative, designed to: make contraceptives more affordable; cement relationships between procurers, program managers, and governments; and to empower advocates to demand quality and cost savings. "Encuentros: Contraceptive Procurement Improvement in Latin America" will act as a vital bridge between a largely sidelined continent and world advances in contraceptive commodity security. The recent Family Planning Summit in London is illustrative of how far reproductive health developments have come in the last decade or so. Commodity prices are lower; pooled procurement is making purchases more affordable; manufacturers show more engagement, thanks to donor backing; and there are more quality-assured products than ever before.

[Read More on Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition](#)



## OUR PLASTIC ADDICTION IS OUT OF CONTROL. HOW CAN WE CONSUME LESS?

Tap water around the world is contaminated with tiny plastic fibres, the Guardian revealed this week, and other pilot studies have revealed microplastics in beer, sugar, salt and honey, as well as in seafood, in the air in cities and in homes. The impact on health of this apparently pervasive pollution is unknown, though microplastics do harm some marine life and scientists are calling for urgent research. The biggest sources of microplastic are synthetic clothing and dust from tyres and road markings. And all the millions of tonnes of plastic released each year eventually break down in the environment into tiny pieces.

[Read More on The Guardian](#)

## EPA NOW REQUIRES POLITICAL AIDE'S SIGN-OFF FOR AGENCY AWARDS, GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Environmental Protection Agency has taken the unusual step of putting a political operative in charge of vetting the hundreds of millions of dollars in grants the EPA distributes annually, assigning final funding decisions to a former Trump campaign aide with little environmental policy experience. In this role, John Konkus reviews every award the agency gives out, along with every grant solicitation before it is issued. According to both career and political employees, Konkus has told staff that he is on the lookout for “the double C-word” — climate change — and repeatedly has instructed grant officers to eliminate references to the subject in solicitations. The ideological shift is a clear break from the practices of previous Republican and Democratic administrations. It bears the hallmarks not just of Pruitt’s tenure but of President Trump’s, reflecting skepticism of climate science, advocacy groups and academia.

[Read More on Washington Post](#)



## MEXICO'S PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS: ENERGY SOURCE OF THE FUTURE

The prickly pear cactus is such a powerful symbol in Mexico that they put it smack in the middle of the national flag. It was considered sacred by the ancient Aztecs, and modern-day Mexicans eat it, drink it, and even use it in medicines and shampoos. Now scientists have come up with a new use for the bright green plant: producing renewable energy. Instantly recognizable with its jumble of spiny discs -- its bright red fruit protruding like fat fingers from each one -- the prickly pear cactus is farmed on a massive scale in Mexico. The cactus's thick outer layer, with all those spines, has always been a waste product -- until researchers developed a biogas generator to turn it into electricity.

[Read More on Biofuel](#)



## INEQUALITIES AND HEALTH: AN OPPORTUNITY MISSED

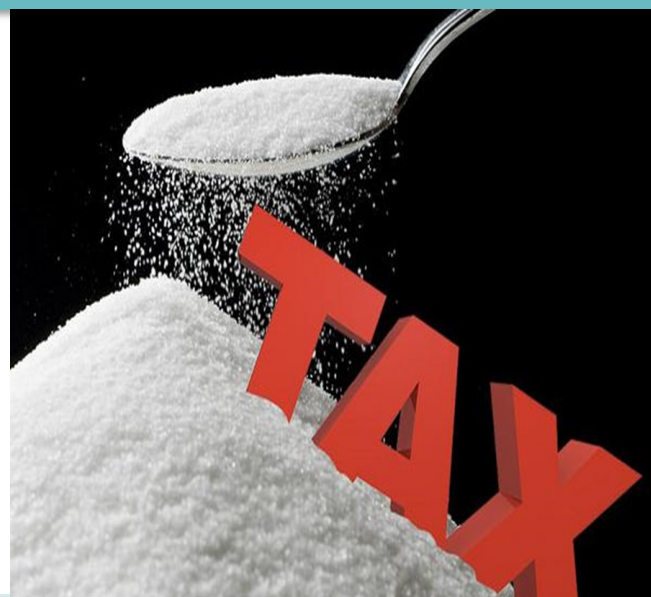
Michael Marmot's new book feels as if this is his attempt to join this distinguished company by providing a systematic and comprehensive overview of his world-renowned contributions to critical epidemiology. Drawing on his extensive global experience, he pursues his theme with vigour and panache. He insists that there are profound differences in health linked to income and wealth: these happen at local and global scales, are evident across the life course and are not declining. These cannot be attributed to lifestyle choices (which is at best a superficial correlation) but are based in fundamental and deep seated inequalities, not only economic but extending to social solidarity and engagement. This basic argument is rammed home time and again, with extensive supporting evidence.

[Read More on Academic Group](#)

## TAXING SUGAR INSTEAD OF SODA PROMPTS HEALTHIER FOOD PURCHASES

In the midst of a nationwide obesity epidemic, several cities and counties have begun levying a new tax on soda and other sugar-sweetened drinks. In early 2017, for example, Philadelphia introduced a 1.5-cents-per-ounce "soda tax" to encourage residents to make healthier beverage choices and raise money for local preschools. In August 2017, shoppers in Cook County, Illinois, started paying a penny-per-ounce tax on sweetened drinks. Many other communities are debating the issue. A new study looks at whether taxing sugar, fat or salt might be a more effective way to get people to cut back on unhealthy foods than taxing specific products.

[Read More on Journalist Resource](#)



## SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS HEALTH:

### SASKATOON HEALTH REGION APOLOGIZES TO INDIGENOUS WOMEN PRESSURED INTO TUBAL LIGATION SURGERY

The Saskatoon Health Region has apologized to Indigenous women who felt coerced into surgery that prevented them from bearing more children. The agency commissioned an independent report earlier this year after women complained they were pressured by medical staff and social workers to have a tubal ligation, a procedure that involves clamping or severing the Fallopian tubes. The report was penned by two Indigenous health experts who are of Métis descent. Yvonne Boyer is a lawyer and Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Health and Wellness at Brandon University, while Judith Bartlett is a physician and former University of Manitoba professor.

[Read More on The Star](#)



## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Up to 12.7m tonnes of plastic enters the world's oceans every year, equivalent to dumping one garbage truck of plastic per minute into the world's oceans. Plastic pollution is almost everywhere.

"It is past time that we tackle the plastic problem that blights our oceans. Plastic pollution is surfing onto Indonesian beaches, settling onto the ocean floor at the North Pole, and rising through the food chain onto our dinner tables. We've stood by too long as the problem has gotten worse. It must stop."

Erik Solheim, Head of UN Environment

[Read More UN](#)

## EVENTSTABLE

DATE	CONFERENCE	LOCATION	REGISTER
June- Sept	Aboriginal Conferences	Canada	<a href="http://aboriginalconferences.ca/">http://aboriginalconferences.ca/</a>
Sept	Canadian Association of Community Health	Calgary	<a href="https://www.cachc.ca/2017conference/">https://www.cachc.ca/2017conference/</a>
25-27	Centres 2017 Conference	Canada	
Sept	Governance of Pharmaceuticals Policy Workshop	Toronto	<a href="http://www.sussex.ac.uk/globalhealthpolicy/events/workshops/pharmaceuticalsandglobalhealth/workshopformat">http://www.sussex.ac.uk/globalhealthpolicy/events/workshops/pharmaceuticalsandglobalhealth/workshopformat</a>
29		Canada	
Sept	The 6th Annual uOttawa Global Health Conference	Ottawa	<a href="http://www.aghnconference.com/">http://www.aghnconference.com/</a>
30		Canada	
Oct	The 48th Union World Conference on Lung Health: Accelerating Toward Elimination	Guadalajara	<a href="http://guadalajara.worldlunghealth.org/about-us/welcome">http://guadalajara.worldlunghealth.org/about-us/welcome</a>
11-14		Mexico	
Oct	Women Leaders in Global Health Conference	Stanford	<a href="https://www.wlghconference.org/">https://www.wlghconference.org/</a>
12		USA	
Oct	Reframing Risk and Accountability for Action to Zero TB	Guadalajara	<a href="http://globalhealth.org/event/reframing-risk-and-accountability-for-action/">http://globalhealth.org/event/reframing-risk-and-accountability-for-action/</a>
12		Mexico	
Oct	Canadian Conference for Global Health	Montreal	<a href="https://www.ccgh-csih.ca/ccgh2015/index">https://www.ccgh-csih.ca/ccgh2015/index</a>
29-31		Canada	
Nov	4th Global Forum on Human Resources for Health: Building the HealthWorkforce of the Future	Dublin	<a href="http://hrhforum2017.ie/">http://hrhforum2017.ie/</a>
13-17		Ireland	
Nov	CATIE (on HIV & Hep C) Forum 2017	Toronto	<a href="http://www.catie.ca/en/forum2017#program">http://www.catie.ca/en/forum2017#program</a>
23-24		Canada	



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# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS AND THE HEALTH GAP: CREATING A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

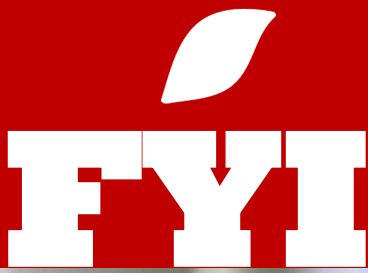


Michael Marmot provides his commentary below:

My consistent message is social justice and evidence-based policies as I seek to engage government and others in action on social determinants of health. A commitment to social justice is important but so too is the evidence. Hence The Health Gap drew on the evidence provided, in addition to the CSDH, by the nine groups of experts we assembled for the English review and the thirteen task groups whose evidence underpinned the European review, as well as evidence accumulated apart from those reviews.

Although I had in mind a more general audience, I cannot deny that I would like the experts to get something from it, too. I am, of course, hurt that Mike Savage found the book a ‘tad disappointing’. He made the assumption, incorrectly, that I was trying to write a big social science book in the Piketty Atkinson mode, and that as a sociologist he, Savage, felt that I didn’t quite make it. Had a big social science book been my ambition, I might well have considered some of the interesting things Savage has to say. But I was not writing primarily for academic sociologists who were looking for me to relate my work to theories of inequality. I wanted to put down what I think we know about social determinants of health and show that we know enough to take action, right now.

[Read More Oxford Academic](#)



# COUNTING STILLBIRTHS AND ACHIEVING ACCOUNTABILITY: A GLOBAL HEALTH POLICY



Although the millennium development goals (MDGs) focused on maternal and child health and survival at inception, the importance of newborn survival to achievement of MDG 4 was soon well recognized. Over the last several years, the relative importance of stillbirths and their links to interventions to address maternal and newborn health have also been under- scored. Despite this advocacy, the estimated 2.6 million stillbirths globally largely remain a hidden issue on the global policy platform, with little to no awareness for action at the country level. It took much effort towards the end of the MDG period to have stillbirth rates included as one of the 16 key indicators for monitoring progress for the global strategy for women, children, and adolescents.

We need better data than modeled estimates to better define the burden and etiology of stillbirths from representative population-based studies or vital registration systems. The latter are relatively uncommon as the source of information in low- and middle-income settings. In this week's *PLOS Medicine*, Dandona and colleagues underscore the importance of still- births in a population-based survey of Bihar (India). The study was based on verbal autopsies conducted on 1,132 stillbirths identified among 100,000 households over a 38-month period. Their identified incidence rate of stillbirths of 21.2 per 1,000 births (95% CI 19.7–22.6) is very close to the modeled estimated rate of 22 per 1,000 births. In a little over a third of these stillbirths, no cause could be identified, whereas obstetric complications and hemorrhage were associated with 30% of stillbirths.

[Read More on Healthy New Born Network](#)

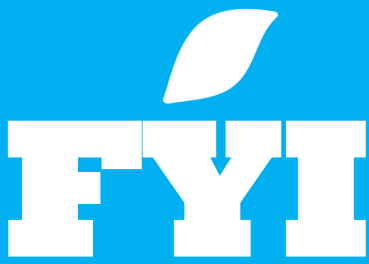


## A GALAPAGOS SEABIRD'S POPULATION EXPECTED TO SHRINK WITH OCEAN WARMING



Within the next century, rising ocean temperatures around the Galápagos Islands are expected to make the water too warm for a key prey species, sardines, to tolerate. A new study by Wake Forest University biologists, published in *PLOS ONE* Aug. 23, uses decades of data on the diet and breeding of a tropical seabird, the Nazca booby, to understand how the future absence of sardines may affect the booby population. The study increases understanding of one species' response to climate change in tropical oceans, but also suggests that other Galapagos predators that do well when sardines are available must adjust to a new menu within the next 100 years.

[Read More on Science Daily](#)



# INNOVATION 'COULD HALVE WIND POWER COSTS BY 2030'



Further innovation in onshore wind power technology could see its unsubsidized development costs cut in half by 2030, according to a new report backed by the US Department of Energy (DOE) released earlier this month.

Despite the President Trump's insistence on rejuvenating the US coal industry, the latest research by his energy department's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) suggests wind power could in fact be one of the cheapest forms of energy generation in the US within the next 10-15 years, beating even natural gas-fired power. Last year, the US wind industry benefitted from an estimated \$14bn in new investments, according to the report, with wind power supplying just over 5.5 per cent of US electricity generation in total.

Continued US investment in the industry could see its levelised installation and operation costs tumble to just \$23/MWh or below by 2030, the report suggests, bolstering its potential as a major low-cost energy source.

Under such a scenario, wind energy deployments could increase to more than 200GW of capacity by 2030 and 500GW by 2050, supplying as much as 20 per cent and 47 per cent of US electricity respectively.

It follows another study this month which found the US had already earned back its expenditure on renewable energy through the health cost savings delivered by cleaner air from avoiding fossil fuel energy.

[Read More on Business Green](#)



# DR. SPACE JUNK UNEARTHES THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE COSMOS



NASA estimates that there are now more than 500,000 bits of human-made debris the size of a marble or larger in Earth orbit. The visual models are striking: Our planet is like a giant beach ball completely surrounded by a dense layer of M&M's (the debris in low Earth orbit), and also by sparser concentric circles of M&M's (the debris at other altitudes, such as geostationary orbit, mostly used for telecommunications). This doesn't even take into account the millions of pieces of debris that are smaller than one centimetre. The Australian researcher Ben Greene says that within twenty years space could be so clogged as to be unusable.

[Read More on New Yorker](#)

[illegible]

## WHAT CAN I DO DIFFERENTLY? WHO CAN I TELL?

[Read More on World's Largest Lesson](#)



Enjoying Late Summer Afternoon Backyard Sun  
Toronto, ON  
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