



# PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY

BRINGING YOU CURRENT NEWS ON GLOBAL HEALTH & ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS

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## THE PLASTICS CRISIS IS MORE URGENT THAN YOU KNOW - RECYCLING BOTTLES WON'T FIX IT

Since we started engineering polymers to make plastic on a mass scale in the 1950s, this byproduct of the petrochemical industry, which uses about 6% of all the oil we extract a year, has spread to myriad manufacturing processes. Plastic is now ubiquitous, insidious and impossible to avoid. It makes up our clothes, containers, bottles, electronics, food trays, cups and paints. Our cars depend on it, so do our computers, roofs and drain pipes. It's the global packaging material of choice. We sleep on it, wear it, watch it, and are in direct bodily contact with it in one form or other all day and night. In one study, 95% of all adults tested in the US had known carcinogenic chemical bisphenol A in their urine. In another, 83% of samples of tap water tested in seven countries were found to contain plastic microfibres. A study published last week revealed plastics contamination in more than 90% of bottled-water samples. Plastic is now in what we eat, drink and breathe, and constitutes a significant and growing threat to human health. [Read more on The Guardian](#).



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## HOW SOUTH SUDAN STOPPED GUINEA WORM DISEASE IN ITS TRACKS

South Sudan has succeeded in interrupting the transmission of Guinea worm disease, bringing the world closer to eradicating the incapacitating infection. South Sudan, which used to be the most Guinea worm-endemic territory in the world, reported no cases in 2017, down from 20,582 at the outset of the campaign in 2006. Because the parasite's life cycle is about a year, a 15-month absence of cases indicates that transmission has stopped. The country now officially enters a three-year surveillance period that paves the way to certification as a Guinea-disease free country by WHO. Guinea worm may become the second human disease in history — after smallpox — to be wiped out globally. Contracted by drinking contaminated water, worms of up to a meter long develop within the human body and emerge through painful blisters that leave patients unable to work or attend school. [Read more on Devex](#).



Backpage: Discussing Wellness in a Laotian Village



## WORLD'S LARGEST HIGH ARCTIC LAKE SHOWS STARTLING NEW EVIDENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Remote areas in Canada's Arctic region – once thought to be beyond the reach of human impact – are responding rapidly to warming global temperatures, the University of Toronto's Igor Lehnherr has found. "Even in a place so far north, it's no longer cold enough to prevent the glaciers from shrinking...If this place is no longer conducive for glaciers to grow, there are not many other refuges left on the planet." "The lake and the lake ecosystem have been in a relatively stable state for hundreds of years, but all it took was a one-degree increase in regional air temperature for it to enter a completely new state," Lehnherr says. "The biological food web looks different, the biogeochemical cycles are accelerated, and we're observing more organic nutrients, contaminants and carbon coming into the system." [Read more on University of Toronto.](#)



## CANADA, PROVINCES LACK CLEAR PLAN TO ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE, AUDITORS SAY

A joint audit, conducted by federal Environment Commissioner Julie Gelfand and auditors general in nine provinces, looks at climate change planning and emissions reduction progress between November 2016 and March 2018. It says while many governments have high-level goals to cut emissions, few have detailed plans to actually reach those goals, such as timelines, funding or expected results from specific actions. The audit says assessments to adapt to the risks posed by climate change have been haphazard, inconsistent and lacking in detail, with no timeline for action and no funding. Not taking action on climate change now will cost the government money later. "It is disappointing when you have politicians pretending that there is no cost to climate change," she said. "Right now the cost to the federal government is in the billions of dollars to deal with the impacts of climate change, whether it's floods, whether it's forest fires, a melting Arctic. We need to be taking action." [Read more on CBC.](#)



## CAN US STATES DELIVER ON THEIR CLIMATE PROMISES?

One of the great challenges in climate policy remains translation of lofty pledges and proclamations into actual policy that is subsequently launched, proves sustainable over time, and ultimately delivers on its expected performance goals. The two decades following the Kyoto Protocol feature some major achievements in carbon pricing and other mitigation policies. But they are also littered with numerous failures and reversals in the United States and beyond. This story line is broadly applicable around the world but is particularly telling in the American case. It is reflected in the Trump Administration's efforts to reverse virtually every climate initiative undertaken by the Obama Administration, including planned emission reductions for carbon in the electricity sector and methane from oil and gas extraction. Once again, we see the limits of executive-driven actions that lack legislative branch buy-in and face the enduring political challenge of developing durable climate policy. [Read more on Brookings.](#)





## UK MAN CONTRACTS WORLD'S FIRST SUPER-STRENGTH GONORRHOEA

A man in the UK has contracted a super-strength strand of gonorrhoea believed to be the first case globally to resist the main antibiotic treatment. Public Health England (PHE) said the patient had a regular female partner in the UK, but contracted the infection from a sexual encounter with a woman in south-east Asia. He visited a health clinic for treatment in early 2018. Attempts to get rid of the sexually transmitted infection with the recommended treatment – a combination of antibiotics azithromycin and ceftriaxone – have failed. "We are investigating a case who has gonorrhoea which was acquired abroad and is very resistant to the recommended first line treatment," Dr Gwenda Hughes, the head of PHE's STI section said. "This is the first time a case has displayed such high-level resistance to both of these drugs and to most other commonly used antibiotics." [Read more on The Guardian.](#)

## FAMILY OF CRICKET FARMERS TRIES NOT TO TAKE THEIR WORK HOME WITH THEM (BUT IT'S HARD)

The business breeds millions of crickets that are ground up in a processor and turned into powder for people to cook and bake with. But months after launching Entomo Farms with his two brothers in 2014, Jarrod Goldin was the only one who hadn't tasted crickets or mealworms. The brothers run a sprawling operation near Peterborough, Ontario that looks from the outside like a conventional farm that would house chickens and cows. But inside, crickets are the order of the day. Now this meal option will be available across Canada, as Loblaws agreed in March to stock the farm's cricket powder under its President's Choice label. While making money is part of their plan, the Goldins say they have an additional goal in mind — mass-producing sustainable food loaded with nutrients like protein and vitamins to help customers live longer, healthier lives. They want to change the paradigm of what's considered icky food. [Read more on The Star.](#)



## GLOBAL DISEASE OUTBREAKS THREATEN ECONOMY

An infectious disease outbreak in Southeast Asia could cost the US economy up to \$40 billion in export revenue and put almost 1.4 million US jobs at risk, according to estimates in a recent article published by CDC experts. "The results of this hypothetical scenario show that the US economy is better protected when public health threats are quickly identified and contained," said Rebecca Martin, PhD, director, CDC's Center for Global Health. The article and an earlier report published by CDC experts emphasize the importance of the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) in protecting US economic interests overseas. The GHSA was launched in 2014 to promote international collaboration between 49 countries to prevent, detect, and quell infectious disease outbreaks. The United States exports more than \$308 billion in goods to participating countries, which supports 1.6 million jobs, according to the earlier report. [Read more on Jama Network.](#)



## £20M 'SECRET PAYMENTS' TO PLUG DRUGS BY ASTRAZENECA AND SHIRE

Two of the UK stock market's biggest pharmaceutical companies have made millions of pounds in "secret" payments to healthcare professionals and organisations, an investigation by The Times has found. At least €22.3 million (£19.6 million) was made in anonymous payments across Europe, including €17.9 million by AstraZeneca, the Cambridge-based company, and €4.4 million by Shire, the rare diseases and neuroscience specialist, the research showed. The figures cover payments such as consultancy fees and "related expenses" and travel and accommodation for events organised or sponsored by the companies. The anonymous payments have been made despite a European self-regulatory code of conduct encouraging drugs companies to renegotiate contracts with professionals, such as doctors, and health organisations in order to include consent to disclose details. [Read more on The Times.](#)

## SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY: CHINA'S BAN ON IVORY SALES COMES INTO FORCE IN 'THE GREATEST SINGLE STEP TOWARD REDUCING ELEPHANT POACHING'

China's complete ban on ivory trade went into effect on Dec. 31, 2017, a major step forward in Beijing's efforts to rein in what was once the world's largest market for illegal ivory. 'From today... the buying and selling of elephant ivory and goods by any market, shop or vendor is against the law!' the Forestry Ministry said on its official account on Chinese social media platform Weibo. The ministry added that the ban also applies to online sales and souvenirs purchased abroad. A partial ban had already resulted in an 80 per cent decline in seizures of ivory entering China. Domestic prices for raw ivory are down 65%. By March 2017, 67 factories and shops involved in China's ivory trade had closed. The remaining 105 were now expected to close. This trade still sees thousands of elephants slaughtered every year. [Read more on Daily Mail.](#)



© AFP/Getty Images



## SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS HEALTH: WILL CANADIAN GOVERNMENT'S \$170 MILLION END WATER CRISIS IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES?

Cape Town, South Africa is running out of water. Compared to Gilford Island, a Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation reserve on B.C.'s temperate rainforest coast, that sounds like an upgrade — at least in Cape Town they still have some water to drink. Kwakwaka'wakw Hereditary Chief Bill Wilson's mother is from that reserve. For 50 years, he has watched the water quality decline — first, as logging removed the island's natural filtration systems, then, as a series of bungled procurements failed to deliver a water filtration system that worked. The David Suzuki Foundation published a new report on water issues on First Nations reserves. It found that while some progress has been made there remains a spending gap and a lack of follow-through. 81 long-term drinking water advisories were in effect on reserves south of the 60th parallel on Feb. 12, 2018; Health Canada reports an additional 26 short-term advisories as of the end of 2017. A Parliamentary Budget Office report found the government has fallen 30 per cent short of providing enough funding to solve the problem. [Read more on The Tyee.](#)

After a night of heavy rainfall, Ana Risatti, a 71 year old farmer in central Argentina, woke to an ominous roar outside her home. Mistaking the noise for a continuation of the night's downpour, she stepped outside to look.

"I nearly fainted when I saw what it really was...The land had opened up like a canyon. Water was pushing through as far as I could see. Huge mounds of earth, grass and trees were being carried along the water surface."

The ravine that carved its way so dramatically across her farm that night has by now grown 15-miles (25km) long. At its deepest point, it measures more than 60 metres wide and 25 metres deep.

-[https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/argentina-new-river-soya-beans?utm\\_source=esp&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=GU+Today+main+NEW+H+categories&utm\\_term=269782&subid=23385490&CMP=EMCNEWEML6619I2](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/argentina-new-river-soya-beans?utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GU+Today+main+NEW+H+categories&utm_term=269782&subid=23385490&CMP=EMCNEWEML6619I2)

## EVENTSTABLE

DATE	CONFERENCE	LOCATION	REGISTER
Available Now	Global Health Watch 5 Launch	Online-available now	<a href="http://www.phmovement.org/en/node/10778">http://www.phmovement.org/en/node/10778</a>
April 20-22	BioVision Alexandria 2018	Alexandria Egypt	<a href="http://www.bibalex.org/bva2018/home/StaticPage.aspx?page=69">http://www.bibalex.org/bva2018/home/StaticPage.aspx?page=69</a>
April 27-29	Pegasus Conference	Toronto Canada	<a href="https://www.pegasusconference.ca/">https://www.pegasusconference.ca/</a>
May 24-26	Indigenous Health Conference	Toronto Canada	<a href="https://www.cpd.utoronto.ca/indigenoushealth">https://www.cpd.utoronto.ca/indigenoushealth</a>
May 25-27	Bethune Round Table: The Role of the Trainee in Global Surgery	Toronto Canada	<a href="https://bethuneroundtable.com/">https://bethuneroundtable.com/</a>
June	McGill University Summer Institutes in Infectious Diseases and Global Health	Montreal Canada	<a href="http://mcgill-idgh.ca/courses/tuberculosis-research-methods/">http://mcgill-idgh.ca/courses/tuberculosis-research-methods/</a>
June 22-24	Annual Conference, The Council of Canadians	Ottawa Canada	<a href="https://canadians.org/conference">https://canadians.org/conference</a>
Oct 8-12	5th Global Symposium on Health Systems Research	Liverpool England	<a href="http://healthsystemsresearch.org/hsr2018/">http://healthsystemsresearch.org/hsr2018/</a>
Nov 15-19	4th People's Health Assembly	Dhaka Bangladesh	<a href="http://www.phmovement.org/en/node/10805">http://www.phmovement.org/en/node/10805</a>
November 19- 21	Canadian Conference on Global Health	Toronto Canada	<a href="http://www.csih.org/en/events/canadian-conference-global-health">http://www.csih.org/en/events/canadian-conference-global-health</a>



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# CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX

## 2017

FYI



This year's Corruption Perceptions Index highlights that the majority of countries are making little or no progress in ending corruption, while further analysis shows journalists and activists in corrupt countries risking their lives every day in an effort to speak out. The index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople. This year, the index found that more than two-thirds of countries score poorly. Unfortunately, compared to recent years, this poor performance is nothing new. This year, New Zealand and Denmark rank highest. Syria, South Sudan and Somalia rank lowest. The best performing region is Western Europe. The worst performing regions are Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Further analysis of the results indicates that countries with the least protection for press and NGOs also tend to have the worst rates of corruption. Every week at least one journalist is killed in a country that is highly corrupt. [Read more on Transparency International.](#)

**FYI**

# MIGRANTS WITHOUT SHOES



It is December 2013. Ethiopian migrant workers descend from the aircraft. They carry plastic bags that hold their belongings. There are few signs that they have benefitted from their hard labour in Saudi Arabia. A few of the migrants walk down without shoes. The air is chilly. They must be cold in their shirts and pants, their feet on the hard ground. What was the reason for their expulsion? The Saudi authorities said that these were migrants who came into the country without papers. They had crossed the dangerous Gulf of Aden in rickety boats. Saudi Arabia welcomes these migrants, even those without documents, largely because they – under duress – offer their services at very low rates of pay. At punctual intervals, the Saudi government goes after these undocumented workers, arresting them in public, throwing them in deportation camps in Riyadh and then shipping them home. That was in 2013. Between June of 2017 and the end of the year the Saudi authorities detained 250,000 foreigners and sent home 96,000 Ethiopians. When the Saudi government feels particularly vicious, it carts the Ethiopians to the Saudi-Yemen border and merely leaves them on the Yemeni side, a country still bombed almost daily by Saudi Arabia. [Read more on IPS News.](#)

# WORLD WOOD DAY SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON FORESTS' IMMENSE VALUE

**FYI**



World Wood Day is a cultural event celebrated annually on March 21st, same day as the International Day of Forests, to highlight wood as an eco-friendly and renewable biomaterial and to raise awareness on the key role wood plays in a sustainable world through biodiversity and forest conservation. The role played by forests and trees, without which humans could not survive, was celebrated by Laos and the international community in Vientiane on the occasion of World Wood Day. Vice President Phankham Viphavanh gave the government's view on the importance of forests when he addressed a special ceremony held to mark World Wood Day. He also highlighted the government's efforts to protect forests and forest resources through determined strategies, and laws and regulations for the management, protection, development, and use of forests. These measures were aimed at restoring forest cover to 70 percent of the country's terrain.

The United Nations General Assembly designated March 21 as World Wood Day in 2012. Since then, numerous celebrations have taken place, starting in 2013 in Tanzania, with the second held in 2014 in the People's Republic of China, the third in Turkey in 2015, the fourth in Nepal in 2016, and the fifth in the United States of America in 2017. These events serve to illustrate the importance of wood as a bio-physical material that is naturally renewable and plays a vital role in environmental protection.

[Read more on Vientiane Times.](#)



## FOODS WITHOUT MEAT: ON THE MENU IN DAVOS, ON A MISSION TO SCALE GLOBALLY



### THE IMPOSSIBLE CHEESEBURGER

Traci Des Jardins, the San Francisco-based restaurateur, was the chef behind the menus at 10 different events at the World Economic Forum meetings in Davos last month. She and her team prepared meals as varied as Italian meatballs, French beef tartare, and Mexican tostadas. They were all made without meat, something that seemed to shock many first timers as they tried what was marketed as “a taste of tomorrow.” Impossible Foods, who supplied the “meat” for the meals, is a Silicon Valley-based company known for the plant-based Impossible Burger. Its key ingredient is soy leghemoglobin, which releases a protein called heme when it breaks down, making the product taste and even bleed like real meat. Investors include Bill Gates and Vinod Khosla, just two examples of a growing number of billionaires who are putting their money behind so called “alt meat companies.” The demand for meat and protein is projected to double by 2050, when there will be 9 billion people on the planet, with 3 billion people in a growing middle class demanding red meat in particular. Livestock produces 15 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, meat production uses immense amounts of water and grain, and the whole system is a major driver of deforestation and habitat loss. The World Economic Forum launched an initiative called Meat: The Future to promote public private cooperation around protein solutions to meet tomorrow’s demand in a sustainable way.

[Read more on Devex.](#)

# HOW NOT TO TALK ABOUT RACE AND GENETICS

**FYI**



In his newly published book *Who We Are and How We Got Here*, geneticist David Reich engages with the complex and often fraught intersections of genetics with our understandings of human differences — most prominently, race. He admirably challenges misrepresentations about race and genetics made by the likes of former New York Times science writer Nicholas Wade and Nobel Laureate James Watson. As an eminent scientist, Reich clearly has experience with the genetics side of this relationship. But his skillfulness with ancient and contemporary DNA should not be confused with a mastery of the cultural, political, and biological meanings of human groups.

Recently, in a *Times* column, a group of 67 scholars from disciplines ranging across the natural sciences, medical and population health sciences, social sciences, law, and humanities, made it clear that Reich's understanding of "race" is no longer viable, that to ignore average genetic differences among races is seriously flawed. For centuries, race has been used as potent category to determine how differences between human beings should and should not matter. But science and the categories it constructs do not operate in a political vacuum. Population groupings become meaningful to scientists in large part because of their social and political salience — including, importantly, their power to produce and enforce hierarchies of race, sex, and class. [Read more on Buzzfeed.](#)



## QUEEN'S ALUMNUS CONNECTS FACULTY OF EDUCATION WITH TEACHER-CANDIDATES IN GLOBAL SOUTH



The Faculty of Education at Queen's University has partnered with 1 Million Teachers (1MT), a start-up by Queen's alumnus Hakeem Subair, to "help attract, train, and retain 1M teachers, as well as develop the capacity to train more" in the Global South through an online platform. Rather than a top-down approach, faculty advisors from Queen's will reportedly engage in dialogue and information exchange with participants. "The teacher-candidates are excited because the whole point is to go sit with these teachers, who are their colleagues, and say 'What do we have in common and how do we support each other?'" said Education Professor Jane Chin. Subair added that 1MT also provides teacher-candidates with access to advanced pedagogical methodologies that might be otherwise unavailable. [Read more on Queens Gazette](#).

"Discussing Wellness With the Village Head" (orange t-shirt)

Together with Provincial Foreign Affairs and Health Departments and Health Poverty Action

Khammouane Province, Laos

April 10, 2018



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