

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## EVENTS

### Clinical-trial death

Five people were hospitalized and one has died after a French clinical trial went disastrously wrong. The phase I trial — designed to test the safety of new treatments in healthy people — involved a drug made by the company Bial near Porto, Portugal, and was conducted by a French contract-research organization, Biotrial, in Rennes. Neither the French authorities nor Biotrial has identified the drug, but Bial says that it was an inhibitor of the enzyme FAAH (fatty acid amide hydrolase). See page 263 for more.

### Ebola returns

Health officials confirmed on 15 January that a 22-year-old woman in Sierra Leone had died of Ebola. The announcement comes two months after the World Health Organization declared that the disease had stopped spreading in Sierra Leone, and less than a day after it was announced that a similar resurgence of the virus in Liberia had ended. The source of the latest case is being investigated; other flare-ups have been traced to survivors who still harboured the virus in semen and other bodily fluids.

### Turkish arrests

Twenty-seven Turkish academics were arrested, and later released, on 15 January

## NUMBER CRUNCH

# \$4.5 bn

Annual amount needed to fight pandemics, says a group convened by the US National Academy of Medicine.

Source: Commission on a Global Health Risk Framework for the Future



SPACEX

## Launch was a success, landing less so

A joint US–European satellite that will track the surface height of the oceans was launched into orbit on 17 January. The oceanography mission Jason-3 will provide data for weather, climate and ocean researchers. But the

Falcon 9 rocket that delivered the satellite into orbit had a less happy outcome. It was supposed to touch down on an ocean barge, but instead toppled over and was destroyed on landing.

for signing a petition calling on their government to end violence in Turkey's southeast, where government forces have been fighting Kurdish separatists. The researchers face prosecution for alleged defamation of the state and spreading of terrorist propaganda. Around 2,000 scientists from about 90 Turkish universities have signed the petition. Several of the universities have launched investigations into signatories in their faculty. See [go.nature.com/gpcarv](http://go.nature.com/gpcarv) for more.

### Zika virus

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a travel alert over the ongoing transmission of Zika virus in 14 countries in the Caribbean and in

Central and South America. The alert — issued on 15 January — recommends that pregnant women consider postponing travel to any areas where Zika infection is occurring. It comes after evidence emerged that, since October, around 3,530 babies have been born in Brazil with unusually small heads and brains — a disorder called microcephaly. That is ten times more than the country usually sees in a year, and cases are concentrated in regions with Zika outbreaks.

## BUSINESS

### NASA spaceplane

Starting in 2019, NASA will gain a third commercial partner for flying cargo to and from the International Space

Station. The space agency announced on 14 January that it will use a miniature spaceplane owned by the Sierra Nevada Corporation in Sparks, Nevada, for a minimum of six missions by 2024. The craft can transport both pressurized and unpressurized loads, and lands on a runway back on Earth, improving NASA's options for delivering and returning fragile scientific equipment. NASA also uses spacecraft from Orbital ATK in Dulles, Virginia, which burn up on re-entry, and from SpaceX in Hawthorne, California, which splash down into the ocean.

### Vaccine deal

Gavi, the international vaccine alliance, announced on 20 January that it has

REUTERS/PICHI CHUANG  
 paid US\$5 million to Merck, manufacturer of the first Ebola vaccine shown to protect against the virus in a human clinical trial. The deal marks the first time that the public-health organization has moved to purchase a vaccine before it has been licensed. In return for the payment, Merck promises that it will seek to have the vaccine approved by a regulatory agency by 2017. See [go.nature.com/ujcirz](http://go.nature.com/ujcirz) for more.

## PEOPLE

**Sentence upheld**

A former biomedical researcher at Iowa State University has failed to reduce his prison sentence for making false statements on successful funding applications to the US National Institutes of Health. On 11 January, a federal appeals court ruled against reducing the sentence of Dong Pyou Han, who pleaded guilty in 2015. At the time, Han was sentenced to 57 months in prison, but he appealed against the sentence two weeks later and argued that its length was unreasonable given his remorse and lawful past. The appeals court disagreed and upheld the sentence.

**Taiwanese election**

An epidemiologist famed for his work on the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and for his



studies on the health burden of arsenic and hepatitis is to become Taiwan's vice-president. Chen Chien-Jen assumes the role after Tsai Ing-Wen, his running mate, won the 16 January election. Chen is widely respected for his work as health minister in Taiwan during the SARS epidemic, and was vice-president of the nation's premier research organization, the Academia Sinica. See [go.nature.com/wrrwn](http://go.nature.com/wrrwn) for more.

**Perpetrator named**

*Nature* and other sources confirmed last week that the faculty member suspended by the California Institute of Technology for harassing two female graduate students is theoretical astrophysicist Christian Ott. Caltech, in Pasadena, announced on 4 January that it had suspended an unnamed faculty

member without pay for an academic year. Meanwhile, in a 12 January statement to the US House of Representatives, Congresswoman Jackie Speier (Democrat, California) highlighted sexual harassment in astronomy. She has called for universities to share information with each other on the outcome of harassment investigations. See [go.nature.com/mnwdim](http://go.nature.com/mnwdim) for more.

## POLICY

**US coal pause**

The United States has halted any new coal mining on federal land as it begins a major review of the coal industry. Interior secretary Sally Jewell announced the review on 15 January and said it would ensure that the federal coal programme took into account the impact of the industry on climate change. Coal power is one of the most greenhouse-gas-intensive forms of electricity generation. The halt on new leases applies while the comprehensive review — which Jewell says is the first in 30 years — is under way.

**Iran sanctions**

The United States and the European Union lifted a broad array of sanctions against Iran on 16 January after it was confirmed that the country had taken steps to impair its

ability to produce plutonium and enriched uranium, which are used in atomic bombs. The lifting of restrictions came within hours of confirmation by the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran was in compliance with the deal it struck with six world powers in July over its nuclear programme. Sanctions have crippled Iran's economy and contributed to the international isolation of its scientists.

**EU reprimand**

The ombudsman for the European Union (EU), Emily O'Reilly, has ruled that delays by the European Commission in dealing with 20 authorization applications for genetically modified (GM) foods and feedstuffs were a "systemic problem" and "constituted maladministration". The ombudsman, who investigates complaints about EU bodies, said on 15 January that the commission had consistently failed to make decisions on the applications within the three-month deadline required by law. A review of EU decision-making on GM foods and feedstuffs is under way, and so O'Reilly did not make a recommendation related to the case. But she said that the commission should comply with current requirements until the review is complete.

**Reproducibility call**

A coalition representing more than 100,000 experimental biologists has released recommendations for enhancing the reproducibility of research. The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, which includes 30 scientific groups, wants to see better characterization of antibodies, easier reporting of negative results, better training for graduate students and established scientists, and fuller descriptions of animal models. See page 256 for more.

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SOURCE: NSF

## TREND WATCH

As the number of scientists and engineers in the United States jumped between 2003 and 2013, so too did the proportion of immigrants. A report from the US National Science Foundation (see [go.nature.com/9hhf15](http://go.nature.com/9hhf15)) shows that immigrants made up just 15% of the 21.6-million-strong science workforce in 2003, rising to 18% of 29 million people in 2013. Asia remains the most likely region of birth for the immigrants; the number of Indian-born scientists nearly doubled, from 515,000 in 2003 to 960,000 in 2013.

**IMMIGRATION INCREASES IN US SCIENCE**

Asia still sends more scientists to the United States than does any other region. But all parts of the world are sending more scientists to the country than they were in 2003.

