



Policy Playback

Dec 14 An analysis of almost 400 **disease outbreaks** worldwide between 1996 and 2009 found that more than half of them occurred in Africa, and about one month elapsed, on average, before the outbreaks there were detected (*Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* **107**, 21701–21706, 2010).

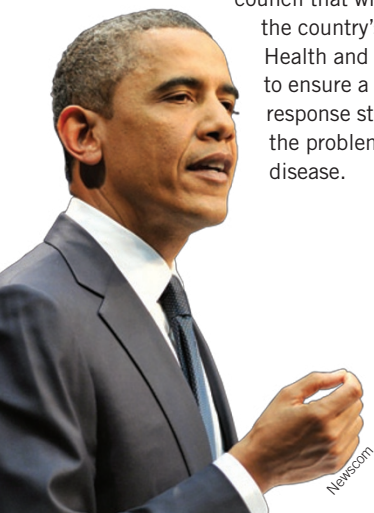
Dec 22 The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Merck's **Gardasil** vaccine, previously approved against human papillomavirus, for the prevention of anal cancer in 9 to 26-year olds of both sexes.

Dec 23 The International AIDS Society revealed that its new executive director will be **Bertrand Audoin**, who previously served as the general director of Sidaction, a French nonprofit that funds AIDS research.

Dec 24 South Korea's Hyundai Engineer and Construction announced it had won a \$534-million contract to build the **Hamad Medical City**, a large-scale hospital center planned in Doha, Qatar.

Dec 27 In yet another instance of an academic center teaming up with a big-name pharmaceutical company, the **Florida branch of the Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute** announced a two year partnership with the Japanese drugmaker Takeda to develop new treatments for obesity.

Jan 4 US President Barack Obama signed the **National Alzheimer's Project Act**, establishing an interagency council that will work with the country's Secretary of Health and Human Services to ensure a coordinated response strategy against the problem of Alzheimer's disease.



Jan 4 News sources reported that the Japanese drug company **Astellas Pharma** filed a lawsuit against the medical journal *Prescrire* claiming that it had published papers misrepresenting the safety and efficacy of the company's eczema ointment Protopic.

Jan 5 An investigative piece by journalist Brian Deer accused the disgraced British researcher **Andrew Wakefield** of flubbing data in his now-retracted 1998 *Lancet* paper that purportedly found a link between the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism (*BMJ* **342**, c5437, 2011). The new article alleged that at least one child had symptoms of autism before receiving the vaccination, although Wakefield denies the accusations that he falsified data.

Jan 5 Researchers at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland retracted their 2006 *Journal of Immunology* study on the role of the signaling chemical interleukin-1 after they learned that a paperwork error had resulted in their using the **wrong type of knockout mice** in the experiments described in the paper.



Jan 6 On the basis of doctor surveys over the past 15 years, researchers estimated that prescriptions for **antipsychotics** in the US rose from 6.2 million in 1995 to 16.7 million in 2006, although the number fell to 14.3 million in 2008 (*Pharmacoepidemiol. Drug Saf.* doi:10.1002/pds.2082, 2011).

Jan 7 Thirty-two states signed an amicus brief petitioning the US Supreme Court to review **'pay to delay'** settlements, arguing that these deals stifle generic drug competition and restrict the availability of more affordable drugs.

Jan 10 Ahead of the upcoming World Health Assembly in Geneva this May, a new position paper recommended that the US destroy all remaining **stocks of the smallpox virus**, citing growing concerns among developing countries in Asia and Africa that they would suffer most if an accidental release were to occur (*Biosecur. Bioterror.* doi:10.1089/bsp.2010.0065, 2011).

Jan 10 A study suggested that **extending the period of data exclusivity** from five years to 12 years in the US would lead to the approval of more than 220 additional new medicines in the next 50 years (*Health Aff.* **30**, 84–90, 2011).

Jan 11 Pharmaceutical companies Eli Lilly and Boehringer Ingelheim, of the US and Germany, respectively, announced that they would jointly develop and market **diabetes drugs**.

Jan 11 **Joshua Sharfstein**, deputy commissioner of the FDA, announced

he would step down from his post to lead the public health department of the state of Maryland.



Associated Press

Jan 12 The inspector general of the US Department of Health and Human Services urged the US National Institutes of Health to require that grantee research institutions file **"conflict of interest"** statements.

Jan 17 Newspapers reported that UK pharma giant **GlaxoSmithKline** was setting aside \$3.4 billion to cover government investigations and product liability claims related to its diabetes drug, Avandia, which has been banned in European markets and is heavily restricted in the US.



ResearchRewind

Dec
20

A collection of four studies cast doubt over whether **xenotropic murine leukemia virus–related virus (XMRV)** is indeed linked to chronic fatigue syndrome, as suggested about a year before. The papers chronicled ways in which laboratory contamination could have falsely produced this connection, including the discovery that mouse cell lines used in key experiments contained murine leukemia virus, which can be mistaken for XMRV (*Retrovirology* **7**, 108, 109, 110, 111, 2010).

Dec
22

A small study involving 80 participants with irritable bowel syndrome came to the surprising conclusion that **placebos** still work even if people know that the pills are fake. Whereas 35% of the untreated group reported improvements in their condition over time, 59% of those given what they knew was a placebo said they felt better (*PLoS One* **5**, e15591, 2010).

Dec
29

On the basis of their review of electroencephalogram data and medical reports, scientists proposed that general **anesthesia** resembles more of a drug-induced coma than a deep sleep (*N. Engl. J. Med.* **363**, 2638–2650, 2010).

Jan
4

An analysis of scalp samples from hair transplantation procedures found that those taken from **balding** areas had fewer hair progenitor cells, suggesting that baldness may result from a stem cell problem (*J. Clin. Invest.* doi:10.1172/JCI44478, 2011).



istockphoto

Jan
4

An analysis of data from five studies involving nearly 4,000 women with breast cancer found that those taking **Avastin** face a small but significantly higher risk of heart failure than their counterparts who received placebos (*J. Clin. Oncol.* doi:10.1200/JCO.2010.32.9060, 2011). The results are another blow to the top-selling cancer drug, which US regulators recently recommended against using for breast cancer.

Jan
5

Splitting pills can cause a splitting headache. Researchers asked five volunteers to split eight different drug tablets by three different methods and found that more than a third of the resulting dosages deviated by more than 25% of the intended amount (*J. Adv. Nurs.* **67**, 26–32, 2011).



Jan
5

A new study of 1,055 families found that women were about 40% more likely than men to inherit a possible genetic risk factor for **multiple sclerosis**, potentially explaining why more women get the disease (*Neurology* **76**, 242–246, 2011).

Jan
7

A comparison of blood samples from six people with **Alzheimer's disease** with samples from six individuals with Parkinson's and six healthy controls identified two antibodies that might accurately diagnose Alzheimer's (*Cell* **144**, 132–142, 2011).

Jan
10

Children born within a year of an older sibling are three times more likely to develop **autism** as those born at least three years after, according to a study of nearly 663,000 second-born children (*Pediatrics* doi:10.1542/peds.2010-2371, 2011).

Jan
14

Using short hairpin RNA to block viral enzymes, scientists generated transgenic chickens that could get the **H5N1 avian flu** but could not spread the disease to other birds (*Science* **331**, 132–133, 2011).

Jan
19

An inexpensive blood **clotting drug**, tranexamic acid, used to treat heavy menstrual periods, could cause a 10% reduction in death rates of trauma patients suffering from excessive bleeding, according to a review of two trials (*Cochrane Database Syst. Rev.* doi:10.1002/14651858.CD004896.pub3, 2011).

Jan
19

By attaching small interfering RNA molecules to short strands of RNA known as aptamers, researchers created an effective **HIV therapy** that wiped out the virus in mice that had humanized immune systems. The approach also protected mice from the drop in T cell counts normally associated with AIDS symptoms (*Sci. Trans. Med.* **3**, 66ra6, 2011).

Corrections

In the January 2011 issue of *Nature Medicine*, the article entitled "Funds go toward biomedical business incubators in Mexico" (*Nat. Med.* **17**, 7, 2011) specified that UNAM scientists had donated 15 million pesos of their own money into a fund for startup companies; however, the correct amount was 5.5 million pesos. Additionally, the piece incorrectly stated that Biohominis created the H1N1 diagnostic kits, when in fact this was done by scientists at UNAM's Biotechnology Institute. Last, the National Science and Technology Council did not provide funding for the development of the H1N1 kits as stated in the text. The errors have been corrected in the HTML and PDF versions of the article.

In the January 2011 issue of *Nature Medicine*, the article entitled "Scarred by disease" (*Nat. Med.* **17**, 18–20, 2011) stated that the STX-100 compound from Stromedix is a small-molecule drug. However, the drug is actually a monoclonal antibody. The error has been corrected in the HTML and PDF versions of the article.