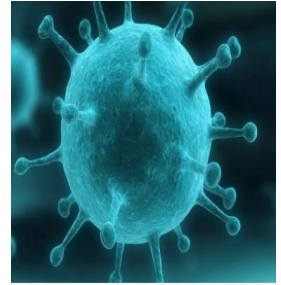




**Century after the ‘Great Flu,’ Virus Continues to Sicken, Confound** – The 2018 flu season in the U.S. is already considered the [most widespread](#) outbreak in the 12 years (since this data was analyzed), present in every state except Hawaii. Some experts say the flu season has peaked, but will likely linger for another 11-13 weeks. H3N2 was identified as the main culprit this winter, which is notoriously severe (especially with the [young and old](#)) as well as resistant to vaccines. With so many cases in a short period, hospitals are overwhelmed (IV bag [shortages](#), etc.) there are reports of school closings in several states. And there have several stories of healthy children and young adults dying from the flu.



H3N2 Up Close

**Assessment:** One hundred years after the 1918 Flu Pandemic, which infected one-third of the world population and killed 50-100 million, health professionals and scientists continue their struggle against the shifty influenza virus. The severity and scope of the 1918 flu is now attributable to many factors, such as overcrowding, vulnerability of those with otherwise strong immune systems, malnourishment, and underreporting from warring nations (both Allied and Central Powers) during WWI. Those factors have been greatly lessened, but annual vaccines are still best guesses on which flu strain will be the most prevalent. Research into a universal flu vaccine is a top priority for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), [according](#) to U.S. News. The CDC has a [FAQ page](#) to address this year’s influenza season.

**Two Americans, Two Canadians Kidnapped in Nigeria** – Two American and two Canadian citizens were kidnapped in an ambush on their small convoy in northern Nigeria on Tuesday. The two police escorts travelling with them were killed in a shootout with the assailants. The four victims are members of an investment team for a solar power project in Kaduna State, where they were taken. The U.S. State Department has [warned against travel](#) to several northern Nigeria states targeted by Boko Haram, specifically citing dangers along the Kaduna-Abuja highway where the abductions took place.

**Assessment:** Kidnapping/hostage-taking continues to increase in frequency globally, and specifically as a source of funding for jihadist groups. Al Qaeda affiliates in Africa alone raised [\\$66 million from ransoms](#) in one year. One study conducted by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point [determined](#) that: “Although kidnappings are often thought of as preplanned events against specific individuals, they often seem to occur opportunistically...” Nevertheless, the same study determined that the U.S., along with five other countries (U.K., France, Italy, Germany, Turkey) “account for more than 60 percent of total, jihadist, and other non-state actor kidnappings.” Terror and kidnapping expert Brian Michael Jenkin’s [study](#) on the U.S.’s no-concessions policy concludes that while the deterrence offers no definitive decline in the number of kidnappings, “it can be argued that more kidnappings might have occurred had the United States routinely made concessions.” He further concludes that the apprehension of kidnappers, and destruction of their gangs, is the best way to reduce the crime.

**13 Emaciated ‘Children’ Emancipated from California ‘House of Horrors’** – A group of 13 siblings, ranging from ages two to 29, were rescued from the squalor and torture that had become their lives in a four-bedroom home in Perris, California when one girl escaped through a window on Sunday and called 911. When sheriff’s deputies arrived at the house, they found three of the siblings chained to furniture, and all emaciated to the point that they took all of them for minors, including the 17-year-old that made the call (who appeared to be 10), and her seven older siblings. The parents listed the home as a school which avoided anyone checking on the children. The siblings needed to be hospitalized and carefully monitored to avoid shock to their systems, which were accustomed to one rationed meal per day.

**Assessment:** Like the [Cleveland captives](#) (2013), the emancipation was accomplished through notification from one of the imprisoned, rather than any discovery from an outsider. Torture victims have been revealed during emergency responses, but many times it is too late. Suspicious activity reporting to, and by, responders can be a vital component of saving such victims. In this case, the couple had no prior contact with police. A Riverside County Sheriff’s captain further [testified](#) that the mother seemed “perplexed as to why we were at the residence,” indicating a level of denial that may help to mask the crimes. January 11<sup>th</sup> was #WearBlueDay, sponsored by the [DHS Blue Campaign](#) to end human trafficking, whose [indicators](#) cross with the California case.



The Missile Alert that Reached Most Phones on the Hawaiian Islands

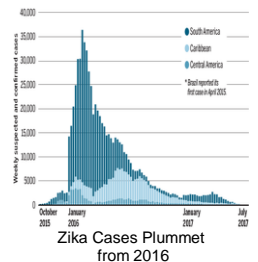
**Hawaii On Edge after Mistaken Missile Attack Alert** – An erroneous emergency alert sent out just after eight o’clock in the morning on Saturday warned residents of the Aloha state of an imminent ballistic missile strike and that people should take shelter, causing Hawaiians to jump into everything from bathtubs, storm drains, basements, or even try to [escape](#) the city at high speeds. And some chose to [receive](#) absolution. There was no quick way to cancel or recall the message, and it took 38 minutes to send out a “corrective” manual alert informing everyone that it was an error, though the state’s emergency management agency was able to [send a tweet](#) 13 minutes later stating that there was no missile threat (nuclear or otherwise).

**Assessment:** Small details matter. The difference between the test button and the actual alert button was one additional word in the drop-down menu: “test missile alert” versus “missile alert.” An investigation will determine how much of the mistake is owed to “human error” and how much blame should be placed on the system itself ([lack of fail-safes](#), etc.). Evaluators will determine if the two buttons or options need to be more remote from each other, and should the live alert require multiple levels to activate. Hawaiians are [angry](#), but protocols will likely improve after this incident. A day after the Hawaii alert, Japanese public broadcaster, NHK, issued a similar false missile alert (corrected within five minutes), but one city’s poisonous [blowfish alert](#) was real.

**Iraq and Syria See Sharp Decline in Terror Deaths** – Total deaths attributed to terrorism and insurgency in Syria and Iraq declined by 44 and 60 percent, respectively, from 2016 to 2017. The recent total in Syria dropped to 3,641, and in Iraq, 3,378—primarily at the hands of ISIS in both cases, which, despite territorial pressures and losses, killed 6,499 last year (down 40 percent from 2016). ISIS, in fact, conducted nine percent more attacks 2017, reverting to insurgent operations (*Watchline* 4.28, 9.14.17). Globally the total fatalities from militant attacks declined from 27,687 to 18,475 from 2016 to 2017.

**Assessment:** According to a study published by Swiss Small Arms Survey, 18 percent of the 560,000 Global Violent Deaths in 2016 were attributable to direct conflict, which encompasses terror deaths. For Syria, almost all violent deaths are attributed to direct conflict (including war), where Brazil, with more than double the violent deaths, had no conflict affliction. Second to Syria in direct conflict deaths was Afghanistan (Iraq third). In fact, Afghanistan has seen a steady rise since 2004 and trails only Syria, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Honduras in terms of violent death rates (per capita). The security-minded need to pay some attention to Afghanistan.

**Year in Review Shows Hope in Global Health** – News site Quartz has [released](#) “On the Bright Side: The 99 best things that happened in 2017,” which offers a positive spin on global events in categories such as health, conservation, living standards, fossil fuel abatement, clean energy and violence/conflict. Some encouraging items included: a new, inexpensive vaccine that could [wipe out cholera](#); the unexpected [disappearance](#) of Zika virus in Latin American and the Caribbean (owed to a collective “herd immunity”); and from 2000-2016, the measles vaccine [saved](#) over 20 million lives globally.



**Assessment:** This week, two international airports, O’Hare in Chicago and Newark in N.J. (close to Manhattan) reported cases of measles, which may have been spread to other passengers. Officials are in the process of notifying any persons who may have been affected. Since a measles outbreak at Disneyland in 2014 that infected 159 people, California took action against the highly infectious, but manageable, disease through a new state law that made vaccinations mandatory (with few exceptions), [NYT said](#). California is working towards its goal of having 90-95 percent of the population vaccinated, essential for herd immunity.