

# WorldWatch

by Staff

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## **Bioterrorism**

Bioterrorism is the release of deadly bacteria, viruses or products of those agents. Smallpox, anthrax and plague pose the greatest threat because they can spread quickly and cause large numbers of deaths. Bioterrorism expert D. A. Henderson warns that terrorists will likely attack the U.S. with the smallpox or anthrax viruses within five to 10 years. "We are a long way away from being even modestly prepared," he says. "But we're doing a lot more now than we did 12 months, or even 6 months ago."

## **Disease**

Health officials confirm that Debra Welsh, 43, is the first human bubonic plague case of the year in New Mexico. She is currently recovering from her brush with the dreaded disease in St. Joseph Hospital in Albuquerque. She says, explaining how she contracted the plague, "Those little drunken, wobbly mice would get into the house, and you could get right up to them and pick them up by their tails and drop them in the toilet. And they would die real fast. We found six of them over the past six months."

## **Paranormal**

Self-described psychics are unhappy with New York City's effort to recruit welfare recipients to work from home as telephone clairvoyants. Nationally known Psychic Network has hired 15 people on welfare since the program began last April. A recruitment flier says qualified applicants must be on public assistance, have "a caring and compassionate personality" and the ability "to read, write and speak English." Job training is available for those ungifted with prophetic powers.

## **Roman Catholic Church**

Roman Catholic priests in the U.S. are dying from AIDS-related illnesses at a rate four times higher than the general population. The *Kansas City Star* reports that death certificates and interviews indicate several hundred priests have died of AIDS-related illnesses since the mid-1980s, and hundreds more are living with HIV, the virus that causes the disease. Six of 10 priests responding to a poll say they know of at least one priest who has died of an AIDS-related illness, and one-third know a priest living with AIDS.

## **Climate**

After linking El Niño with illnesses such as malaria, cholera and dengue fever, scientists at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health have now connected the climatic phenomenon with an increase in childhood diarrhea. Diarrhea kills as many as 3 million children under age 5 worldwide every year and sickens millions more, mostly in developing countries.

## **European Union**

In Austria, the conservative People's Party has formed a government with the right-wing Freedom Party, led by Joerg Haider, who once praised Adolf Hitler's "orderly employment policy," and called Waffen SS veterans "decent people of good character." Haider will not join the government himself and has apologized for the offending remarks, describing Nazism as a "bloody and cruel dictatorship."

Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt has asked for a special meeting of EU foreign ministers to discuss the political situation in Austria and defend the "democratic values" on which the EU was founded. Such an unprecedented meeting—EU nations traditionally stay out of its member states' internal affairs—is being considered by the Portuguese presidency of the EU. Concern has also been growing worldwide, particularly in Israel, about the Freedom Party joining the Austrian government.

## **Parenting**

Under new government proposals, Britons could no longer discipline their children by spanking them with anything other than their hands. If passed, the law would forbid the use of all implements, such as canes, belts or slippers, in physical punishment, along with smacking any part of a child's head and face. The proposals stop short of an outright ban on physical discipline, however. "We are determined to ensure that nothing undermines a parent's right to discipline a child in a loving and caring environment," health minister John Hutton says. "We do not believe the criminal law should dictate to a parent's responsibility for their children." Children's rights groups welcome these recommendations, although many want the government to ban all forms of physical punishment.