

WorldWatch

by Staff

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Weather

- » Two earthquakes of 5.7 and 4.9 magnitude hit central Italy on September 26, killing 10 and damaging 4,100 homes.
- » Hundreds of thousands of Alaskan seabirds apparently starved to death in recent months because of El Niño. Autopsies showed the birds had anemia, wasted muscles and no body fat.
- » Windswept rains causing floodwaters up to 9 feet killed at least 22 people in Spain and Portugal. Five days of rain in Somalia resulted in 130 dead and 300,000 without homes or food.

Middle East

- » Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said that under certain circumstances, he would favor a preemptive strike against long-range missile systems that threaten Israel.
- » Sheik Ahmed Yassin, a political leader of the militant Palestinian group Hamas, told the al-Hayat newspaper that peace with Israel is prohibited by Islamic law. However, a truce is permissible for up to 10 years to give the Muslims time to build up their strength to defeat the Israelis.

Marine Disease

A toxic organism, *Pfiesteria piscicida*, has killed more than a billion North Carolina fish, a N.C. State University scientist reports. *Pfiesteria* has also been found in Maryland, Virginia and Delaware. Laboratory workers have suffered neurological problems, and others have experienced learning and memory difficulties after contact with the cell.

Family

The number of children being raised fatherless has grown 300% since 1960. This affects two of every five children. Currently, 70% of the prison population serving long sentences are men who grew up fatherless.

Health

- » A 3-year-old boy died in May after contracting an influenza strain never before seen in humans. Laboratories in 4 countries identified a specimen collected from the boy's trachea as a virus called "influenza A of H4N1 strain," previously found mainly in birds.

» In the last 7 years, 400 people have contracted necrotizing fasciitis, commonly known as the "flesh-eating disease." It attacks the fascia or deepest layer of skin and irreparably destroys tissue, spreading as fast as one inch per hour. Doctors must remove skin, large muscle groups, even limbs to save a person's life.

» Researchers report that highly resistant strains of bacteria that cause middle-ear infection, sinusitis and pneumonia are twice as common as they were a year ago. The overuse and/or misuse of antibiotics are the main culprits for drug-resistant bacteria.

Science

» British researchers are warning against transplanting animal organs into humans. They recently found two sets of "silent" viruses in pig cells, which could infect humans. Pigs are prime candidates for organ transplants as pig organs are the right size, they are bred quickly and are easy to raise. The scientists are now trying to breed virus-free pigs.

» Other British scientists have developed a frog embryo without a head, a technique that could lead to the production of headless human clones to grow replacement organs and tissue. People could have transplants "grown to order" from their own cloned cells, easing the shortage of organs for transplant. This would also eliminate organ rejection, since the genetic composition of the organ would exactly match the patient's.