

# bmj.com news roundup

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## WHO praises China's control measures for SARS

As the global outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) continues to slow, the World Health Organization has reduced its advice about not visiting certain places to only two areas—Beijing and Taiwan.

This came after Dr David Heymann, WHO's executive director for communicable diseases, visited Beijing to look into the sharp drop in the number of SARS cases in China. At the end of his visit Dr Heymann praised China's infection control measures, including surveillance of passengers on trains, buses, and airports, a nationwide media campaign, and the large number of fever clinics set up to assess those with suspected symptoms of SARS.

However, WHO is still concerned about the lack of a sustainable surveillance system, delays in the flow of information, and poor contact tracing—in 70% of cases in Beijing contacts cannot be traced.

Jane Parry *Hong Kong*

## Court stands by decision on Gulf war syndrome

The High Court in London refused last week to overturn a ruling that officially recognised for the first time the existence of Gulf war syndrome.

Mr Justice Newman dismissed an appeal by the Ministry of Defence against a decision last year by a war pensions appeal tribunal that Shaun Rusling, a former sergeant in the Parachute Regiment, had the syndrome as a result of his service in the 1991 Gulf war.

However, the judge emphasised that he was not making any ruling on the existence or otherwise of Gulf war syndrome, and the judgment will have no bearing on the damages claim against the Ministry of Defence by thousands of veterans who claim to have developed the syndrome after service in the Gulf.



MINE ROEMER/ROEMERPHOTO.COM

## US investigates 82 cases of monkeypox virus

Laboratory tests have confirmed an outbreak of monkeypox virus in the United States. Monkeypox is a rare viral disease that is allied to smallpox but is less lethal. It occurs mostly in central and western Africa and is called monkeypox because it was first found in 1958 in laboratory monkeys.

Early in June at least 20 cases from three midwestern states were reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Within two weeks 82 cases were under investigation in five states. No deaths have been reported.

The source of the current outbreak may be an exotic pet dealer in suburban Chicago who housed prairie dogs with a Gambian giant rat thought to be the primary source of infection. Prairie dogs are popular as exotic pets and sold mainly in the midwestern states.

Two of the cases reported in Wisconsin were Steve and Tammy Kautzer from Dorchester, who are pictured above with their daughter Schyan and their prairie dog Chuckles.

Information on the outbreak is at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
Fred Charatan *Florida*

Mr Rusling appealed to the tribunal after he was turned down in 1994 for a war pension on the basis of a range of illnesses and symptoms that he attributed to Gulf war syndrome. After he lodged his appeal but before it was heard, the Ministry of Defence accepted his claim for a pension, but on the basis of "symptoms and signs of ill defined conditions", explicitly rejecting the label Gulf war syndrome.

The ministry argued that, as it had resolved the claim in Mr Rusling's favour, the tribunal should not have gone on to hear the appeal and should not have concerned itself with the label Gulf war syndrome.

But the judge said the tribunal's decision could not be legally impugned. He ruled: "A right of appeal in connection with a diagnostic label exists

because both parties have an interest in the diagnosis being correct."  
Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

## New South Wales cracks down on commercial scanning

Medical entrepreneurs who run Australia's fast growing whole body scanning industry have vowed to fight a government crackdown on the practice after claims that the procedure poses a danger from radiation.

The New South Wales government has imposed a range of new conditions on operators of the computed tomography (CT) scanners, which can identify a range of health conditions.

Owners and operators of CT machines could now face fines of up to \$A165 000 (£66 000; \$110 000; €93 000) or two years in jail, or both, for breaches of the controls. It is now illegal to perform whole body CT on a member of the public without a written request from an independent doctor and unless the person undergoing the scan has the health risks involved fully explained.

Companies offering whole body screening advertise widely in daily newspapers, with slogans, such as: "In just 30 seconds we might find something your doctor may not find for ten years."

Defenders of the scanning services claimed last week that the new regulations were not based on science and were an unfair attempt to damage an industry by a Labor state government that did not like the commercialisation of medicine.  
Christopher Zimm *Sydney*

## Fees waived for university researchers publishing through BioMed Central

Biomedical researchers at 180 UK universities will soon be able to share their findings at no cost to readers as the result of a deal struck between the open access publisher BioMed Central and the Joint Information Systems Committee (a joint committee of UK further and higher education funding bodies).

From 1 July, charges for processing articles will be waived for all UK higher education staff when they are published in any of BioMed Central's peer reviewed journals, in which all research content is freely available.

Unlike traditional journals, BioMed Central charges authors (or their funding agencies) for publishing their articles—which are then made available at no cost to readers in one of its more than 90 electronic journals. Several other publishers are expected to follow BioMed Central's lead in the next year.