



**NEW YORK:** In this photo, medical assistant Jennifer Martinez draws blood from Joshua Smith that will be tested for PFOS levels in Newburgh, New York. —AP

## TESTS SHOW LEAD IN EAST CHICAGO DRINKING WATER

**EAST CHICAGO:** Environmental Protection Agency officials say the federal agency's tests have discovered elevated levels of lead in drinking water in a northwestern Indiana city where contamination already has forced some residents to move. The EPA on Thursday confirmed the lead levels in some homes in East Chicago. Acting regional administrator Robert Kaplan told The (Northwest Indiana) Times that the results are preliminary and don't indicate if there is a widespread problem. He advised concerned residents to use a water filter.

Earlier this year, some residents of public housing were told to move because of high levels of lead and arsenic found at the complex, which is on the former site of a plant that melted lead and copper and is on the EPA's list of priority cleanup sites. The EPA said in November that it would conduct a number of pilot programs, including drinking water testing at properties at the Superfund site. East Chicago Mayor Anthony Copeland wrote in a letter posted online and confirmed by his office that says

the EPA told him 18 of the 45 homes tested had at least one water sample exceeding the standard of 15 parts per billion for lead in drinking water.

Even low lead levels in children can reduce IQ, ability to pay attention and academic achievement. In his letter, Copeland criticized the EPA for using what he called a "new, unproven (and) unaccredited test" and releasing the data without quality control procedures. But the EPA doesn't fault the city for not knowing about the lead drinking water levels sooner, Kaplan said.

"This is not a test typically conducted by a water authority. No one is faulting the water authority," said Kaplan, adding that the testing isn't new and has been used elsewhere. Copeland says he's asking for state and federal funding to replace all water infrastructure that may contain lead or violate water safety standards. The dangers of lead contamination were highlighted this year by the crisis in Flint, Michigan, where old pipes leached lead into the city's drinking water beginning in 2014. —AP

## JAPAN LAUNCHES MUCH-NEEDED SUPPLIES TO SPACE STATION

**CAPE CANAVERAL:** A Japanese capsule blasted off with much-needed supplies for the International Space Station on Friday, a week after a Russian shipment was destroyed shortly after liftoff. The Russian rocket accident and the grounding of one of NASA's commercial suppliers make this delivery all the more urgent. The spacecraft should arrive at the station Tuesday. "Have a safe flight," French astronaut Thomas Pesquet said in a tweet from the space station. "Looking forward to your arrival!"

The capsule - called Kounotori, or white stork - contains nearly 5 tons of food, water and other supplies, including six new lithium-ion batteries for the station's solar power system. Astronauts will conduct spacewalks next month to replace the old nickel-hydrogen batteries that store energy generated by the station's big solar panels. This is Japan's sixth shipment to the 250-mile-high outpost, currently home to Pesquet, two Americans and three Russians. It launched from Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan.

Launches by SpaceX, meanwhile, have been on hold since a September rocket explosion on the pad in Cape Canaveral, Florida. The helium pressurization system in the rocket's upper stage was breached, resulting in a massive fireball. The company hopes to resume flights next month from Southern California. Iridium Communications satellites will be aboard that initial launch. A space station supply run is supposed to follow a few weeks later from Cape Canaveral.

In a televised interview from the space station following Friday's launch, NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson said there are already enough supplies to last until spring. The Japanese shipment will stretch that out even further. The Russians lost a spacesuit in the Dec 1 launch accident, among many other items, she noted. "Spaceflight's not an easy thing," Whitson said. "We just have to keep pressing ourselves to do the right thing, make sure we're doing all the right tests ... so that we don't have these problems." —AP



**JAPAN:** In this photo taken on December 9, 2016, Japan's H-1B rocket launches from the Tanegashima Space Center in Tanegashima island, Kagoshima prefecture. —AP

# SOUTH BEACH HALTS ZIKA'S SPREAD, BUT RISKS REMAIN

'WE'RE 'Z-FREE' - I WON'T SAY THE WHOLE WORD'

**MIAMI BEACH:** Florida declared its crisis with local transmission of Zika over for the season Friday in a welcome announcement ahead of peak tourism months, but health authorities warned that travelers would continue bringing the disease into the state. Starting in late July, state health officials had identified four zones in the Miami area where the virus was spreading through local mosquitoes - the first such transmissions in the continental US - and launched aggressive efforts to control the insects.

One by one, the zones were deemed clear of continuing infections, and Gov Rick Scott announced Friday that the last one - a 1.5-square-mile area in touristy South Beach - also was cleared. The beginning of South Florida's cool winter season also helped suppress the disease-carrying mosquitoes, Florida Health Secretary Dr. Celeste Philip said. Although the mosquito threat has abated, Philip noted that travelers would continue to arrive from elsewhere with the virus and that it could still be spread between people through sexual contact.

"Hopefully, by next summer, we'll have a federal government that has a vaccine," said Scott, a

Republican who has repeatedly criticized federal officials for an impasse over Zika funding. Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez said in a statement that he met this week with the director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to plan for potential Zika outbreaks next year. Local officials also said residents should continue to do their part to control mosquitoes year-round in South Florida.

About 250 people have contracted Zika in Florida, and over 980 more Zika infections in the state have been linked to travel, according to state health officials. Zika causes mild flu-like symptoms for most people, but it can cause severe brain-related birth defects when pregnant women become infected. The CDC lifted a warning for pregnant women to stay out of the South Beach zone altogether, but the agency still urges them to consider postponing nonessential travel to Miami-Dade County. Zika testing is recommended for all pregnant women and their partners if they've traveled to Miami-Dade County since Aug 1.

There have been 187 pregnant women in Florida who tested positive for the Zika virus,

including women infected elsewhere, state health officials said Friday. Ninety-five of those women have sought treatment through the University of Miami Health System and Jackson Memorial Hospital, according to Dr. Christine Curry, an obstetrician-gynecologist and the co-director of the university's Zika Response Team. For her patients, clearing the South Beach zone "doesn't mean they get off the hook of wearing repellent and long clothing and being cautious overall," Curry said.

Researchers say some birth defects caused by Zika infections may not be apparent at birth but develop months later. Florida's tourism industry initially panicked when mosquitoes began spreading the disease in Miami's arty Wynwood district in July, but the state nonetheless saw record number of visitors so far this year, including to last week's art fairs in South Beach and Wynwood. Still, tourism officials at Scott's news conference were jubilant. "We're 'Z-free' - I won't say the whole word," Bill Talbert, president and CEO of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, said at the rooftop news conference at a hotel on South Beach's famed Ocean Drive. —AP



**HONOLULU:** This photo provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service shows the world's oldest known seabird, tending to an egg she laid, with her mate, at Midway Atoll, a wildlife refuge about 1,200 miles northwest of Honolulu. —AP

## THE WORLD'S OLDEST KNOWN SEABIRD IS EXPECTING AGAIN

**HONOLULU:** The world's oldest known seabird is expecting again. Biologists spotted the Laysan albatross called Wisdom at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge earlier this month after she returned to the island to nest. She was incubating an egg at the same nest she uses each

year with her mate. She's believed to be 66 years old. She's also the world's oldest known breeding bird in the wild.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service's project leader for the refuge, Bob Peyton, said in a statement Friday that Wisdom has been returning to

Midway for over six decades. An ornithologist first put an identification band on her in 1956. She's had a few dozen chicks. Midway is about 1,200 miles northwest of Honolulu. It's part of the Papahānaumokuākea (pah-pah-HAH'-now-moh-cuh-ah-cay-ah) Marine National Monument. —AP

## PARIS FIGHTS AGAINST RODENT INFESTATION

**PARIS:** Both Nadine Mahe des Portes and the rat panicked when she inadvertently stepped on it on her walk back from work through Paris. "I heard a terrible squeak," the property agent recalled with a shudder. "I thought I'd stepped on a child's toy or something." When Parisians are literally tripping over rats on the sidewalk, it is clear that the City of Light has a problem. Professional exterminators with decades on the job struggle to recall infestations as impressive - perhaps that should be repulsive - as those now forcing the closure of Paris parks, where squirmy clumps of rats brazenly feed in broad daylight, looking like they own the place.

On Friday, City Hall threw open one of the closed parks, the Tour Saint-Jacques square a block from the Seine, to show journalists its latest anti-rat drive. The park in the heart of the city is only a short walk from the Pompidou art museum. Two Japanese tourists searching for Notre Dame cathedral, also just minutes away, thankfully didn't notice the rats in bushes just in front of them when they stopped to ask for directions.

The furry princes of the city were all over the park, sauntering across the footpaths, merrily grazing in the undergrowth and far more bothered by pigeons competing with them for breadcrumbs than by people walking past and the rattle and hum of the morning rush hour. Unfortunately for City Hall's exterminators, they also seemed totally uninterested in recently laid traps baited with poison. The park attendant, Patrick Lambin, said his morning round had yielded just one cadaver. Before the park was closed in November, rats foraging for food hung like grapes off the trash bins and regularly scampered through the children's play area, sowing panic, he said.

### 'Rats are profiting'

Lambin suspects the infestation has been made worse by Parisians and tourists who leave food out for the pigeons and, in particular, a homeless man who swings by most mornings with bags of stale bread recovered from local eateries. "The rats are profiting," he said. In a 39-year career of extermination, City Hall's Gilles Demodice said he'd rarely seen anything quite like it. "A few years back, you'd not see so many rats during the day," he said. "Now it's night and day, all the time. So it's a big worry." European Union regulations governing the arsenal of poisons and traps that can be used against rats have complicated the job of extermination, he explained.

He said they used to drop biscuits of poison directly into rats' nests and seal them up, but that technique is no longer allowed, forcing them to instead lay black plastic boxes of poison - which the rats studiously ignored - among the bushes. "It's a lot less effective," he said. How many millions of rats reside in Paris is anyone's guess.

Reynald Baudet, who works in the city's most famous pest-control store and has 30 years in the business, notes that since one rat couple can produce hundreds of offspring, the population can grow quickly, if left unchecked. "This is the first year I've seen so many of them," Baudet said. His store, with dead rats hanging in its window and rat traps decorating its Christmas tree, appeared in cartoon form in the movie "Ratatouille," the animated tale of Remy, a Paris rat with dreams of becoming a chef. "The war must be total," Baudet said. —AP



**PARIS:** A rat looks on in the Saint Jacques Tower park, in the center of Paris, Friday, Dec 9, 2016. —AP

## ENDANGERED SPECIES OF SEA OTTERS FLY INTO FRANCE

**BREST, France:** A pair of jetlagged sea otters arrived in France on Friday after a 9,000-kilometre flight from Alaska to their new home at a sea life park. The otters, an endangered species hunted to near extinction because of their highly prized fur, are native to the shallow coastal waters of the north Pacific. The two males, named Matcha and Tangiq, looked relieved to take a cool bath in a quarantine centre in France after spending 15 hours aboard a private jet chartered specially for the journey.

They will go on show at the Oceanopolis sea life centre in the city of Brest in northwest France, which brought another three sea

otters to France last June from Alaska. Only one of them has survived. Their transfer from the SeaLife Center in Alaska was part of a conservation effort for sea otters that have been cared for in captivity and cannot be released into the wild.

The mammal is still considered endangered, even though a hunting ban has helped their numbers rebound to an estimated 126,000 worldwide, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Thanks to their thick fur, the voracious eaters are able to spend much of their lives in the water preying on crustaceans and small fish-while trying to avoid hungry killer whales. —AFP



**FRANCE:** A sea otter pictured at the Oceanopolis centre in Brest, western France, on December 9, 2016. —AP