

August 19, 2024

Headlining This Week's Brief

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Top Stories

WHO Declares Global Health Emergency Over New Mpox Strain

The World Health Organization (WHO) [declared](#) a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) in response to a rapid upsurge in cases of mpox in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and neighboring countries. The spread has been driven by a more transmissible and deadly virus strain dubbed clade 1b. As of this writing, the DRC has [reported](#) over 500 deaths and thousands of infections, already surpassing last year's total. Cases of the new strain have been reported in [Sweden](#) and [Pakistan](#), with officials saying that more are [likely](#) to crop up outside of Africa in the coming weeks. Despite this, U.S. health officials [say](#) the current risk to the general American public remains low. European authorities have [issued](#) a similar judgment. Several nations, including [China](#), the [U.S.](#), the [U.K.](#), [Japan](#), and [Taiwan](#), have issued advisories and raised alert levels for travelers to affected regions. Enhanced screening and surveillance measures are being implemented at various points of entry to prevent further spread. More information is available in AlertMedia's [Situation Report](#).

Potential Work Stoppage at Canadian Rail Companies to Rattle Supply Chains

Disruptions to railway services are expected across Canada due to a lockout of unionized railway workers set to begin this Thursday. For several months, the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference and Canada's two largest rail companies—Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) and Canadian National (CN)—have been at loggerheads over provisions around crew scheduling, rail safety, and worker fatigue. Now, CPKC and CN have [delivered](#) formal 72-hour lockout notices to members of

the Teamsters, while the Teamsters gave their strike notice to CPKC, setting the stage for a shutdown of freight traffic across the country beginning at 12:01 am on Thursday.

The companies, collectively responsible for [transporting](#) around \$1 billion worth of freight daily, began halting shipments of certain hazardous materials and refrigerated products last week to clear routes ahead of a possible work stoppage. CPKC [indicated](#) that beginning tomorrow, it will "stop all shipments that start in Canada and all shipments originating in the U.S. that are headed for Canada." Canadian National reportedly began "barr[ing] container imports from U.S. partner railroads" last Friday. Should a stoppage [extend](#) for more than a few days, it would have [widespread effects](#) on supply chains in Canada and North America.

Tropical Storm May Threaten Hawaii's Big Island

As of midday today, the National Hurricane Center was monitoring three different disturbances within the [Central](#) and [Eastern Pacific](#). The two westernmost features are visible in [regional satellite animations](#). The formation of a named storm is likely as disturbed weather moves westward through August 22. Forecast models generally agree that the system will pass within 150 miles of Hawaii's Big Island sometime around Sunday or Monday, August 26. Tropical storm watches, and warnings could be issued by the weekend if forecast trends continue. It is important to note that the system would likely have minimal strength due to only marginally favorable water temperatures (26C) just east of land. Direct hits from westward-moving storms are extremely rare in this area due to borderline ocean temperatures and the frequent presence of dry air and wind shear.

In August 2023, [Hurricane Dora](#), a major hurricane, passed over 500 miles south of Hawaii but enhanced trade winds, indirectly resulting in the exacerbation of the [Maui wildfire](#). This year, much of the state is contending with severe [drought conditions](#). While this storm is expected to be considerably weaker, a closer path would likely result in enhanced winds. However, it is too early to determine whether an abundance of rain and moisture will move inland or if a more southerly track would promote elevated winds and (drier) fire conditions. Interests near the Big Island and Maui should monitor weather [forecasts](#) over the next week.

Climate and Natural Hazards

- **While Northeast U.S. Gets Taste of Fall, Excessive Heat Persists Over Southern Plains:** As of Monday afternoon, a cold front is progressing eastward across New England, with the tail-end of the boundary extending along the Mid-Atlantic coast. For the first time in several months, consecutive days of cooler-than-average temperatures are forecast, with daytime highs in the 70s anticipated between Tuesday and Thursday. Parts of interior New England and Upstate New York will experience afternoon temperatures in the 60s. Meanwhile, across Texas and adjoining areas of the Southern Plains, a sprawling ridge of high pressure

will support above-normal August temperatures through the end of the week. Highs between 103-108, locally higher, will dominate west-central Texas, including Austin and San Antonio. Localized [heat warnings](#) are in effect. Extreme heat and humidity will significantly increase the potential for heat-related illnesses, particularly for those working or participating in outdoor activities. Daily Heat Risk progression can be viewed [here](#).

- **Rampant Wildfire Activity Over Southern Europe Persists:** Officials in Türkiye are [warning](#) of additional wildfire outbreaks days after large incidents prompted urban evacuations. In southern France, over 3,000 tourists were forced to [evacuate](#) because of a wildfire over the weekend. Above-normal temperatures and elevated fire danger will continue across much of southern Europe this week; however, the Balkan Peninsula, including northern Greece, may benefit from scattered shower activity.

Worldwide

- **Blinken in Middle East as U.S. Pushes for Ceasefire in Gaza:** U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is again in the Middle East this week ahead of another round of Gaza [ceasefire talks](#) in Egypt that are taking place in the shadow of potential reprisal attacks from Iran and Hezbollah for the killing of two key figures in Beirut and Tehran. While those anticipated actions have not yet occurred, other developments have threatened to derail negotiations, including a [bomb blast in Tel Aviv](#) yesterday that both Hamas and Islamic Jihad took credit for, an [attack](#) by Israeli settlers on a village in the West Bank, and an Israeli [strike on a warehouse](#) in Lebanon that reportedly killed 10. Despite the setbacks, Blinken has [called](#) this “the best, maybe the last opportunity” to reach an agreement.
- **Nordic Countries Boosting Efforts to Stem Spread of Swedish Gang Activity:** Nordic countries are [ramping up police cooperation](#) to prevent Sweden’s [gang problem](#) from spreading to neighboring countries. Sweden and Denmark will station police officers in each other’s territory to improve real-time information sharing, with a particular focus on preventing minors from joining criminal networks. Additionally, a hub of police officers from Finland, Norway, and Denmark will be established in Stockholm. Norwegian and Finnish officers are already in the capital, and Danish officers are set to join in the coming weeks. The move comes amid rising concerns over reports of gangs spreading across the region. Outside Albania, Sweden has the [highest gun crime death rate](#) in Europe.
- **Libya Troop Mobilizations Spark Concerns Over Renewed Violence:** Recent events in Libya have led to concerns over [renewed conflict](#) as tensions rise between its two rival administrations, the U.N.-backed Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli and Khalifa Haftar’s House of Representatives based in Tobruk. Earlier this month, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya [issued statements](#) urging “maximum restraint” from all parties following the mobilization of forces in “various parts” of the country. Fighting was reported between groups east of Tripoli, and just days after the U.N.’s plea, an [armed attack](#) was launched on the Central Bank of Libya. Experts believe Haftar may be angling to take control

of [Ghadames airport](#) and the surrounding area, a move that would likely lead to further clashes.

- **Germany Seals Military Base After Suspected Sabotage:** A German military base near Cologne-Bonn airport was temporarily closed on Wednesday due to suspected sabotage of its water supply. Employees were advised not to drink tap water while samples were analyzed. The base's barracks were sealed off but reopened when no intruders were found. The base hosts the Bundeswehr's Air Transport Wing, which is responsible for aircraft used by Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Law enforcement and military intelligence continue to investigate the potential sabotage.
- **Ukrainian Assault on Kursk to Create "Buffer Zone" as Russia Pushes Forward Elsewhere:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy [stated the aim of the operation](#) in Russia's Kursk oblast that began August 6 was to prevent further attacks by Moscow across the border. The incursion has boosted Ukrainian morale, which was sapped by a failed counteroffensive last summer and months of grinding Russian gains in eastern Donbas. Despite the success of Ukraine's surprise attack, Russia continues to make gains elsewhere, with its forces now less than six miles away from the logistical hub of [Pokrovsk](#). Elsewhere in Ukraine, the U.N. has warned of a [deteriorating safety situation](#) at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant following a drone strike near the site's perimeter.
- **Chinese, Philippine Coast Guard Ships Collide in South China Sea:** Early Monday, a Chinese and Philippine Coast Guard vessel [collided](#) near the Sabina Shoal, reigniting tensions in the disputed South China Sea. The incident is the first time China and the Philippines have clashed over the Sabina Shoal, located within what the Philippines considers its exclusive economic zone. This latest confrontation comes after the two countries [reached a deal](#) aimed at deescalating tensions around the nearby Second Thomas Shoal.

Cyber and Regulatory

- **U.S. Government Publishes Algorithms for Post-Quantum Cryptography Readiness:** Computer system administrators are [transitioning](#) to post-quantum algorithms amid concerns that, in the future, quantum computers could be used to break current encryption forms. The U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) [released](#) three post-quantum encryption standards designed to withstand cyberattacks from a quantum computer, with an additional set of algorithms expected to be announced before the end of the year. Experts [expect](#) that quantum computing devices could be developed to break current encryption methods within two decades, with security officials especially [concerned](#) that data collected by hackers now could be decrypted by malicious actors.
- **Eighteen-Year-Old Vulnerability Discovered in Popular Browsers:** The "0.0.0.0 Day" vulnerability is a critical security flaw recently discovered in all major web browsers, including Chrome, Firefox, and Safari, on both Mac and Linux operating systems. The vulnerability, which has existed for nearly two decades, allows malicious websites to interact directly with services running on a user's local network, potentially enabling cyber actors to gain

unauthorized access or execute code remotely. According to the cybersecurity company that disclosed the issue, [Oligo Security](#), the major browsers have implemented urgent fixes in response to the vulnerability's discovery, including blocking access to address 0.0.0.0.

- **Experts Warn Microsoft's Copilot AI Can be Weaponized for Phishing Attacks:** Microsoft is implementing security mechanisms for its generative AI chatbot, Copilot, to defend against malicious use by hackers. Researchers at the Black Hat security conference [published](#) a briefing detailing how hackers can evade security controls by using [prompt injections](#). One notable exploitation the researchers found is that once a hacker has access to a user's email account, they can use Copilot to automate [spear phishing campaigns](#) that mimic the user's email style. Other exploitations noted in the researchers' findings include bypassing Microsoft's protections on sensitive files to retrieve sensitive information through a hacked email account and using the AI's database to return banking information.
- **"Time is Money" Initiative Cracks Down on Consumer Annoyances:** The Biden administration [unveiled new rules and efforts](#) targeting "deliberately complicated procedures that cost consumers," according to President Joe Biden's domestic policy adviser, Neera Tanden. "These [...] inconveniences don't happen by accident," she said. The Federal Trade Commission is reviewing a proposed rule requiring companies to make it as easy to cancel a subscription or service as it was to sign up. Meanwhile, several U. S. agencies are working on regulations mandating that companies offer customers a single button to reach a real person instead of navigating a lengthy phone tree "doom loop," according to officials. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau plans to issue rules cracking down on "time-wasting chatbots" used by banks. Some business executives reportedly chafed at what they see as efforts to vilify and over-regulate the industry.
- **CISA Advises Organizations to Disable Cisco Legacy Smart Install Feature:** The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued an alert last week [recommending](#) that organizations using Cisco network devices disable its legacy Smart Install feature and utilize type eight password protection to protect passwords within configuration files. According to CISA, cyber actors have been manipulating available protocols or software on Cisco devices—like the Smart Install feature—to acquire system configuration files. Then, cyber actors exploit weak password types to access system configuration files, potentially compromising an organization's network. CISA also urges Cisco device users to review the NSA's [Cisco Password Types: Best Practices guide](#) and [Smart Install Protocol Misuse advisory](#) for further guidance.

Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **Cargo Explosion in China Snarls Trans-Pacific Container Traffic:** Chinese authorities have issued warnings about carrying hazardous cargoes following an [explosion](#) on a container ship docked at the world's third busiest container port in Ningbo. The impacted vessel was reportedly carrying lithium batteries and tert-butyl peroxybenzoate. The latter is a chemical compound that must be stored in temperatures less than 30 degrees Celsius. It had reached

39 degrees in Ningbo on the date of the explosion. No deaths or injuries were reported in the incident. Still, it prompted the [closure](#) of Ningbo Beilun's Phase III Terminal, disabling key trade lanes in the Pacific Ocean and disrupting the global supply chain as record peak volumes are being recorded for North American imports.

- **National Legislation in India Draws Controversy:** Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi [vowed](#) to continue efforts to implement a national civil code, which, if successful, would standardize laws related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance independent of religion. The bill is opposed by many of the [200 million Muslims](#) in India, who see it as an "attack on their faith," as well as other minority groups. In other legislative news, Modi's government recently [withdrew](#) a [broadcasting services bill](#) that would have classified influencers and social media pages as "digital news broadcasters," thus requiring them to undergo registration and "content evaluation" by the government. Critics of the bill said it would allow excessive government control over the media.
- **More Ships Shunning Panama Canal Despite Return to Near-Normal Levels:** While the number of booking slots for the Panama Canal has [risen](#) to 35, just one less than the daily average before last year's drought, traders in liquefied natural gas (LNG) and grain have been [slow](#) to return. Only 13 ships carrying LNG crossed the canal in July—fewer than half the number in July 2022. During the drought, the cost of transiting the canal skyrocketed. The Panama Canal Authority (PCA) also forced customers to pre-book slots, hampering flexibility for shippers and causing more to switch to longer but more reliable routes. PCA Director Ricaurte Vásquez said that while officials can't control the weather, he is focused on reliability, especially as climate change is expected to continue threatening water levels.
- **167,000 Pounds of Frozen Chicken Recalled Over Traces of Metal:** Last Friday, Perdue announced a [recall](#) of over 167,000 pounds of its frozen chicken products over concerns of trace metal contamination. After receiving various consumer complaints, food and safety authorities at the company determined the source to be a "thin strand of metal wire that was inadvertently introduced into the manufacturing process." The decision to issue the recall was "out of an abundance of caution," and so far, no injuries or illnesses have been reported. Consumers affected by the recall are urged to discard the contaminated products. A full list and details of impacted products can be found [here](#).
- **Ford, General Motors Hit by Recalls Over Potentially Dangerous Defects:** The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) [issued](#) several recalls last week, primarily affecting Ford and General Motors (GM) vehicles. Ford is recalling hundreds of thousands of cars over issues ranging from engine compartment fire risks to steering column defects that may lead to loss of steering wheel control. GM announced a recall of over 21,000 of its 2023-2024 Cadillac LYRIQ all-wheel drive vehicles over a flaw in their anti-lock brake system. The defect may cause the system to "activate unexpectedly and release brake pressure," which could potentially result in a crash.

Health

- **CDC Issues Alert Over Uptick in Human Parvovirus Cases:** Last week, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a [Health Advisory](#) over an observed increase in human Parvovirus B19 activity across the United States. Parvovirus B19 infections are usually mild and result in none or minimal symptoms; however, cases in pregnant or immunocompromised individuals can lead to more [serious issues](#). The current uptick in the U.S. is seen primarily in children aged five to nine years and follows a similar increase [reported](#) in several European countries. The CDC advises pregnant and immunocompromised individuals to seek medical care if they have signs or [symptoms](#) of the virus.
- **U.S. Health Officials See Moderate Risk of Future Bird Flu Pandemic:** While the current threat from avian influenza to humans in the U.S. remains low, the CDC predicts a “moderate risk” of the virus leading to a future pandemic. The agency’s [latest assessment](#), published this month, is in line with previous modeling, though the assessed likelihood saw a [slight increase](#) from analysis published in 2023. At least 13 human bird flu cases have been [reported](#) in the U.S. this year amid a rise in viral activity in wild birds, poultry, and dairy cows.
- **Increased Oropouche Virus Activity Prompts CDC Alert:** The CDC issued an [advisory](#) over an increase in [Oropouche virus](#) infections in the Americas region and the associated risk for travelers heading to impacted areas. Over 8,000 cases have been reported across Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Cuba this year, with Brazil accounting for the majority of infections. The CDC’s warning came just weeks after the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) [urged](#) member states to strengthen surveillance for Oropouche given the increase in cases, its spread to areas with no history of infections, and reported deaths due to the virus. In the last few months, over a dozen imported cases have been [recorded](#) in Europe.
- **As Ceasefire Talks Falter in Gaza and Sudan, Disease Spreads:** The World Health Organization (WHO) is [planning](#) two rounds of polio vaccination campaigns in Gaza in the coming weeks after the disease was [reportedly](#) identified in an unvaccinated 10-month-old. The case marks the first in Gaza in 25 years. It follows [warnings](#) from the WHO over a potential outbreak after they identified traces of poliovirus in wastewater samples from the territory. While officials work to prevent further polio cases in Gaza, authorities in Sudan, another conflict-stricken location where peace talks between warring parties faltered last week, are [battling](#) an outbreak of cholera that has left at least 22 people dead.
- **Other Health Stories the Global Intelligence Team Is Watching:** The metro area of Milan, Italy, is facing an [outbreak](#) of Legionnaires' disease, though European officials [maintain](#) that the infection risk is limited to those residing or living in the specifically impacted areas: primarily Corsico and Buccinasco. In the U.S., health officials issued an [update](#) on a recent series of salmonella cases linked to cucumbers, noting that 449 illnesses had been reported across 31 states and the District of Columbia. The CDC says cucumbers from the affected growers are no longer on shelves. Also, in the U.S., the Biden administration [announced](#) that

prices were finalized for the first 10 drugs as part of the Medicare drug price negotiation program.

Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **DNC Begins in Chicago Amid Planned Mass Protests:** Demonstration activity around the [Democratic National Convention](#) kicked off yesterday, with several hundred people peacefully [marching](#) for LGBTQ rights. Earlier today, "March on the DNC" led thousands to what is expected to be one of the week's largest demonstrations. On **Tuesday**, several pro-Palestine groups will demonstrate at the Israeli Consulate at 7 pm. Other rallies will take place at Grace Church of Logan Square at 6 pm and Humboldt Park at 4 pm. On **Wednesday**, another pro-Palestine demonstration is expected near Union Park at 4 pm. On **Thursday**, March on the DNC will close out the convention with another mass procession from Union Park beginning at 5 pm. Further details on demonstrations and other security considerations are available in AlertMedia's [Situation Report](#).
- **U.S. Hotel Workers Approve Strikes:** Around 3,000 hotel workers in San Francisco [voted](#) overwhelmingly to authorize strike action at any time after their contract expires. They [join](#) workers in [San Jose](#), Boston, Honolulu, Baltimore, Providence, Rhode Island, and New Haven, Connecticut, who have also approved a walkout. Union members in Seattle, Oakland, and San Diego also have contracts set to expire by the end of the month and are expected to hold their strike votes. Around 10,000 hotel workers across the U.S. could strike this fall, although a specific date has not yet been set.
- **Strikes and Protests by Doctors Continue Across India:** Doctors in India are [continuing](#) to strike and protest following the rape and murder of a trainee physician in Kolkata. On Saturday, members of the India Medical Association (IMA), the country's largest association of medical doctors, held a 24-hour work stoppage across all public and private hospitals, withdrawing all non-essential care. Other doctors' groups have held their own strikes, with government-run hospitals in [West Bengal](#) state most severely affected. Doctors have threatened further action unless the government increases security protocols for medical workers.
- **Port Workers Across India Threaten Walkout:** Following three years of stalled negotiations, members of the All India Port and Dock Workers' Federation, which represents workers across India's 12 largest ports, have said that they will begin an [indefinite strike](#) on August 28. A walkout would likely impact port operations across the country, with other unions expressing support for the measure, including the Water Transport Workers' Federation of India. The workers are demanding pay increases, benefits, holiday pay, and the resolution of other grievances.
- **Italian Freight Drivers, Argentine Airline Workers on Strike:** Freight transportation disruptions are possible across Italy between today and Wednesday during a [nationwide strike](#) by truck and heavy vehicle drivers. The drivers are demanding better wages, shorter working hours, and more safety measures. Across the Atlantic, airline workers in Argentina

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have called for a [staggered strike](#) and series of demonstrations at airports across the country beginning today and running through the end of the month.

Upcoming Events

- August 19-22: Democratic Party National Convention (Chicago, IL)
- August 19-29: Ulchi Freedom Shield Military Exercises (South Korea)
- August 22: Possible Beginning of Rail Strike (Canada)
- August 24: Independence Day (Ukraine)
- August 26: Janmashtami (India)
- August 28-September 8: Paris Paralympic Games (France)
- August 31: Independence Day (Malaysia)
- September 1: Parliamentary Elections (Azerbaijan)
- September 2: Independence Day (Vietnam)
- September 2: Labor Day (United States)
- September 7: Presidential Election (Algeria)
- September 7: Ganesh Chaturthi (India)
- September 10: Presidential Debate (Philadelphia, PA)
- September 10: Legislative Elections (Jordan)
- September 10-24: United Nations General Assembly (New York City, NY)
- September 15-16: Mawlid (Eid-e-Milad an-Nabi) (Global)
- September 15-October 15: Fiestas Patrias, Hispanic Heritage Month (Global)
- September 16: Independence Day (Papua New Guinea)
- September 17: Mid-Autumn Festival (Global)