

Officials, Rabbis Clash Over Safety Of Ritual

NEW YORK (AP) — A group of rabbis are clashing with New York City health officials over the safety of an ancient circumcision ritual. Three rabbis and three Jewish groups asked a federal court Thursday to block enforcement of a new regulation requiring written parental consent for a rite called "metzitzah b'peh," in Hebrew, which city health experts said can spread infection and has killed two children since 2004.

During the ritual, the person performing the circumcision attempts to cleanse the wound by sucking blood from the cut and spitting it aside.

The saliva contact puts the infant at increased risk of getting herpes simplex, a virus that is carried harmlessly by a large majority of adults but that can be deadly in newborns.

New York City's Health Department said it has documented 11 cases of the infection since 2000 among children believed to have undergone the ritual. Ten required hospitalization. Two developed brain damage. Two died.

Police: Search Continues For Missing Colo. Girl

WESTMINSTER, Colo. (AP) — Colorado police looking for a 10-year-old girl who disappeared on her walk to school have found a body in a park, but are not saying whether it is linked to the case and noted Thursday that officers are still searching for her.

The discovery of the body is the latest turn in the disappearance of Jessica Ridgeway that has seen police look for clues in a reported sighting in a car with Colorado plates in Maine and a Wyoming abduction. The FBI said Thursday that abduction was unrelated.

Police spokesman Trevor Materasso said the body "is not intact," and that has slowed the work of identification. Materasso said no other information would be released until Friday, and he left a brief midday news conference without answering any questions.

Police earlier declined to say whether the body was that of a child. The body was found late Wednesday at Patridge Park in park in the Denver suburb of Arvada, about seven miles from where Jessica disappeared in the nearby suburb of Westminster on Oct. 5.

CDC Tracks Down People At Risk From Shots

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health officials have tracked down 12,000 of the roughly 14,000 people who may have received contaminated steroid shots in the nation's growing meningitis outbreak, warning Thursday that patients will need to keep watch for symptoms of the deadly infection for months.

"We know that we are not out of the woods yet," Dr. J. Todd Weber of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said as the death toll reached 14.

Of the 170 people sickened in the outbreak, all but one have a rare fungal form of meningitis after receiving suspect steroid shots for back pain, the CDC said. The other case is an ankle infection discovered in Michigan; steroid shots also can be given to treat aching knees, shoulders or other joints.

Fungus has been found in at least 50 vials of an injectable steroid medication made at a specialty compounding pharmacy in Massachusetts, investigators said. Health authorities haven't yet said how they think the medication was contaminated, but they have ruled out other suspects — other products used in administering the shots — and the focus continues to be on that pharmacy, the New England Compounding Center.

Compounding pharmacies traditionally supply products that aren't commercially available, unlike the steroid at issue in the outbreak. And Dr. Madeleine Biondolillo of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health said it appears the company violated state law governing those pharmacies, which aren't supposed to do large-scale production like a drug manufacturer. Instead, they're supposed to produce medication for patient-specific prescriptions, she said.

Wash. Could Become First To OK Pot Sales

SEATTLE (AP) — Washington state is on the verge of becoming the first in the nation to let adults over 21 buy taxed, inspected marijuana at state-licensed shops.

It might not clear up more than a decade of confusion that resulted from the state's medical marijuana law, or reverse the proliferation of dispensaries. But supporters say passing Initiative 502 on Nov. 6 could make drug laws more reasonable, prevent thousands of arrests a year, and bring Washington hundreds of millions of dollars to help pay for schools, health care and basic government services.

It could also set up a big fight with the federal government. Voters in Colorado and Oregon are considering similar measures. But based on polls, Washington's initiative might stand the best chance of passing. The measure has drawn slim organized opposition and gained support from some former federal law enforcement officers. The campaign has raised \$4.1 million.

"There's a real disconnect with pot," said Brooke Thompson, a retired teacher from Bainbridge Island who found marijuana innocuous when she smoked it as a young adult. "It's been criminalized and criminals are making money on it. The state could be making money on it, and using the taxes to go into education. It seems like a win-win, and it would be nice for Washington to be the testing ground on this."

"Testing ground" is the right phrase. Washington could become a laboratory in easing the nation's drug war, which has cost more than \$1 trillion and hundreds of thousands of lives in the past 40 years while doing little to dent demand.

Just as likely, it could bring on a protracted fight with the federal government. Marijuana remains illegal under U.S. law, and when state and federal laws conflict, federal law takes precedence. The Justice Department has kept mum, but if I-502 passes, many lawyers believe the DOJ is likely to try to block the law on the grounds that it frustrates the Controlled Substances Act.

That could leave just part of the initiative standing: decriminalization of up to an ounce of pot under state law, with no way to buy it legally, and a driving-under-the-influence standard that opponents consider arbitrarily strict.

Turkey:

Syrian Plane Was Carrying Ammunition

BY SUZAN FRASER AND FRANK JORDANS
 Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Escalating tensions with Russia, Turkey defended its forced landing of a Syrian passenger jet en route from Moscow to Damascus, saying Thursday it was carrying Russian ammunition and military equipment destined for the Syrian Defense Ministry.

Syria branded the incident piracy and Russia called the search illegal, saying it endangered the lives of Russian citizens aboard the plane.

The accusation by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan contradicted denials by both Russia and Syria that anything illegal had been aboard the Airbus A320 that was intercepted over Turkish airspace late Wednesday.

"Equipment and ammunitions that were being sent from a Russian agency ... to the Syrian Defense Ministry," were confiscated from the jetliner, Erdogan told reporters in Ankara. "Their examination is continuing and the necessary (action) will follow."

He did not provide details, but Turkish media said the seized cargo included missile parts as well as radio receivers, antennas and other military communications equipment.

"As you know, defense industry equipment or weapons, ammunitions ... cannot be carried

on passenger planes," Erdogan said. "It is against international rules for such things to pass through our air space."

Erdogan refused to say how — or from whom — Turkey had learned that the twice-weekly scheduled flight would be used to transport military gear to Syria.

"As you will appreciate, those who gave the tip, which establishments, these things cannot be disclosed," he said.

The United States said it backed Turkey's decision to intercept the plane.

"Any transfer of any military equipment to the Syrian regime at this time is very concerning, and we look forward to hearing more from the Turkish side when they get to the bottom of what they found," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland.

She declined to comment on Turkish reports that the intelligence on the plane's contents had come from the United States. The plane was allowed to continue to Damascus after several hours, without the cargo.

Turkish-Syrian relations have plummeted over the conflict in Syria, which has expanded into a civil war that threatens the stability of the Middle East. Syrian opposition activists estimate more than 32,000 people have been killed since March 2011, when the uprising against President Bashar Assad's regime began.

21 Accused In NYC Of Selling Meds On Craigslist

BY TOM HAYS
 Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Craigslist ad offered black-market Percocet pills for sale but warned potential customers: "No LE please." Meaning: No law enforcement.

Like that made a difference.

The 40-year-old man accused of placing the ad was among 21 people arrested in an attempt by the New York Police Department to make an example out of some of the smallest of small-time drug dealers: students, young professionals and others who clean out the medicine cabinet and then are brazen enough — and foolish enough — to offer the pills for up to \$20 a pop over the Internet.

"Whether the drug deal occurs on the street corner or on the Internet, it's a crime," Bridget Brennan, special narcotics prosecutor for New York City, said Thursday in a statement announcing the arrests.

Undercover narcotics investigators answered the ads and ended up buying handfuls of powerful prescription painkillers and other pills for a few hundred dollars, typically in broad daylight and in public settings such as coffee shops, Penn Station or Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village.

Some of the sellers turned out to be run-of-the-mill drug dealers also peddling cocaine and heroin, police said. But many were more mainstream: Among those arrested were a New York University graduate student, a financial adviser and a 62-year-old woman who works as a freelance photographer.

The pills came from the sellers' own meds or were stolen from relatives, friends and co-workers, authorities said. Some of the dealers were out to make a quick buck — even though their backgrounds would suggest they didn't need the money.

The arrests come as law enforcement agencies around the country battle a surge in illegal sales of highly addictive painkillers like Percocet and Roxycodone and, increasingly, attention-deficit drugs like Adderall — transactions that now rival the cocaine and heroin trade both in volume and as a public health hazard.

Because the drugs have legal medical uses, they carry less of a stigma than illegal narcotics.

After they were arrested, some of the sellers claimed they didn't know what they were doing was a crime. But investigators don't buy it.

"You'd have to be living under a rock to not know it's illegal," Brennan said.

Brennan's office reached out to San Francisco-based Craigslist earlier this week to try to get its cooperation in finding ways to discourage the Internet marketing. A Craigslist spokeswoman had no comment Thursday.

The undercover investigators began answering Craigslist ads late last year. By the time they were done, they had made 63 buys — about \$19,000 in pills and \$10,400 in cocaine.

One ad was placed by a self-described "friendly NYU student." It offered "pain and anxiety relief." Just in case there was any confusion, it signed off with "perc roxy." And a smiley face.

U.S. Takes Financial Action Against Violent Street Gang

BY ALICIA A. CALDWELL
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration declared the ultra-violent street gang MS-13 to be an international criminal group on Thursday, an unprecedented crackdown targeting the finances of the sprawling U.S. and Central American gang infamous for hacking and stabbing victims with machetes.

The Treasury Department formally designated MS-13, or Mara Salvatrucha, a transnational criminal organization. The aim is to freeze it out of the U.S. financial system and seize what are estimated to be millions of dollars in criminal profits from drug and human smuggling and other crimes committed in this country.

The gang was founded by immigrants fleeing El Salvador's civil war more than two decades ago. Its founders took lessons learned from that brutal conflict to the streets of Los Angeles and built a reputation as one of the most ruthless and sophisticated street gangs, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement Special Agent Jason Shatarsky.

With as many as 10,000 members in 46 states, the gang has expanded far beyond its initial roots. Members are accused of major crimes including murder, kidnapping, prostitution, drug smuggling and human trafficking.

The group established itself in Los Angeles before spreading across the U.S., said Shatarsky, an MS-13 expert assigned to ICE's na-

tional gang unit. The group's violence — using a machete to hack a victim to death or shooting someone in the head in broad daylight, for instance — surprised authorities and even rival gangs.

"They saw a level of violence that hadn't been seen before," Shatarsky said, adding that as the gang has expanded it has also become more sophisticated than many rivals.

The gang, which is allied with several of Mexico's warring drug cartels, has a strong presence in Southern California, Washington and Northern Virginia, all areas with substantial Salvadoran populations. Shatarsky said its members target residents and business owners for extortion, among other crimes. The gang is also active throughout Central America and in parts of Mexico. Authorities in Europe have reported evidence of MS-13 expanding operations there.

Among the most high-profile killings attributed to MS-13 in Virginia was the 2003 slaying of a pregnant teenager who had become an informant. Brenda Paz, 17, was stabbed to death and her body was left along the banks of the Shenandoah River. Gang members have also been linked to the 2007 execution style shooting deaths of three friends in a schoolyard in Newark, N.J. One victim was slashed with a machete before being shot. Six people have been charged in the case.

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Engagement Announcement



Hershfeldt - Odens

Gary and Karen Hershfeldt of Holyoke, CO, wish to announce the engagement of their daughter Amber Hershfeldt to Trent Odens, son of Jerome and Donna Odens of Springfield, SD.

Amber is the Granddaughter of Peggy and the late Paul Hershfeldt of Holyoke, CO, and the late Clyde and Merna Markussen of Ogallala, NE. Trent is the Grandson of John and the late Miriam Tolsma of Avon, SD and the late Joe and Hattie Odens of Springfield, SD.

Amber is a graduate of Holyoke High School and is employed at Melissa Memorial Hospital in Holyoke, CO. Trent is a graduate of Avon High School and is employed at Lamar Fertilizer in Lamar, NE.

The couple is planning a November 3, 2012 wedding.

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