

► Dow Jones industrial average slumps 77.07 points to 10,483.60; Nasdaq index drops 128.83 to 3863.10; 30-year Treasury bond yield holds at 5.96%, 1.48.
 ► USA TODAY Internet 100 drops 4.77 to 152.35. 4B.
 ► Japan's Nikkei is down 204 points, 1.2%, to 17,232 at 1 a.m. ET today; yen is 107.10 per dollar; Hong Kong's Hang Seng index is up 125, 0.8%, to 16,599.

Clinton reaching out to new Mexican leader

President Clinton seeks to open a relationship with president-elect Vicente Fox as soon as possible, even though the two will only hold office at the same time for two months. 10A.



By Paul McErlane, Reuters

Northern Ireland: Masked youths challenge police Wednesday as tensions mount over Protestants' plan to march through a Catholic neighborhood Sunday; a 20-foot-high steel barricade has been erected. 10A.

'In God we trust' coming to Colo. schools?

The state board of education plans to consider whether to display the motto in schools to remind students of moral standards. Supporters say the court can't object since the phrase is on U.S. currency. 2A.

Backs carry weight of disability complaints

Ailing backs have become the largest impairment alleged by people who file on-the-job discrimination cases, prompting criticism of ADA disability law. 5A.

N.H. chief justice could be impeached

A panel has voted that state Supreme Court's David Brock be impeached for his role in a fellow justice's divorce case; the state senate weighs in next. 3A.

Natural gas crisis looms

A shortage could double heating bills this winter. Supplies are thin because producers cut back on exploration and power plants are already using up their winter inventories. 1B.

Today's debate: Gas prices

In USA TODAY's opinion, "Flawed clean-air rules, ethanol subsidies boost prices." 14A.

► "Facts simply do not support blaming exorbitant gasoline prices on the new rules for reformulated gasoline," says Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa. 14A.

Money: Real estate's new tack online

Online real estate brokerages are tapping technology to offer customers better deals. There's the potential to save money, as long as the customers do some of the work. 1B.

► Wall Street lashes out at high-techs that can't meet or beat analysts' earnings estimates. 1B.

Sports: Sampras, Agassi closer to final

The two Americans are one step from colliding in the finals at Wimbledon. Meanwhile, London bookies like Serena to beat sister Venus today. 1C.

► New York pounds Portland 62-45, and Seattle soaks Minnesota 67-60. WNBA. 10C.

Life: Blind readers wait for 'Potter' books

Young readers who rely on Braille to get their Harry Potter fixes will have to wait until the end of the month until the special editions of the new *Goblet of Fire* episode are ready. The others arrive Saturday. 1D.

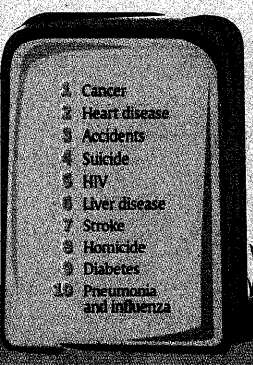
By John O. Buckley

USA TODAY Snapshots®

Cancer tops causes of death

Cancer is the leading cause of death among 33- to 51-year-old people in the USA. Top causes:

Note: Rankings are for 1997, the latest data available.



By Hilary Wasson and Genevieve Lynn, USA TODAY



Crossword 10D
 Editorial/Opinion 14-15A
 Lotteries 10D
 Marketplace Today 10-11D
 State-by-state 12A
 Stocks 4, 8-10, 12-14B



By Robert Hanashiro, USA TODAY



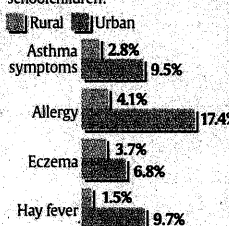
Pig Pen by Charles Schulz, from United Feature Syndicate Inc.

Cover story

By Steve Sternberg
 USA TODAY

Rural vs. urban

Comparison of allergy and asthma symptoms in rural vs. urban Kenyan schoolchildren:



Source: Thorax, 1998

By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Until 200 years ago, hay fever was unheard of. When London doctor John Bostock described the first cases in 1828, he made a curious observation: "I have not heard of a single unequivocal case among the poor."

By 1871, Londoner Charles Blackley had proved hay fever is triggered by pollen. Why then, he wondered, do farmers and their families have "the fewest cases of the disorder?"

The two men had instinctively stumbled upon what is one of the hottest questions in allergy research: Can too much clean living make people sick? Or put another way, is a little bit of dirt a healthy thing?

Known as the hygiene hypothesis, this notion holds that growing up in cities, insulated from nature, makes people more susceptible to allergies, asthma, certain autoimmune diseases and perhaps even diabetes.

Why? Because good hygiene leaves the body's immune system underemployed and looking for something to do. Soon, the immune system begins overreacting to pollen, animal dander and other ordinarily harmless substances.

"The immune system learns from experience," says Irwin Cohen, an im-

Please see COVER STORY next page ►

Clinton summons new Mideast summit

Future of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and Jewish settlements are 'core issues' for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat next week at Camp David. 10A



By Jonathan Evans, Reuters

Barak: Visits London Wednesday to discuss Mideast.

Flight attendants will descend on airports and government offices around the world today to demand tougher rules against unruly passengers.

Flight attendant unions say passenger air rage often disrupts pilots and could threaten safety.

In 1999, airlines referred 178 cases of assault, threats, intimidation and interference with a flight crew to the Federal Aviation

number of incidents might be closer to 4,000.

The International Transport Workers' Federation, a group of transport workers' unions, wants governments to allow courts to prosecute foreign passengers arriving on international flights. It also wants airport authorities, airlines and law enforcement agencies to form liaisons groups to prevent, manage and police disruptive behavior.

The unions call their campaign "Zero Air Rage."

US Airways flight attendant Logan International Airport

urging fliers to "keep their cool." Atwood says a drunken passenger verbally assaulted him last year. He will urge airlines to tighten alcohol policies.

"It's gotten to the point where it's really a threat to everybody," says Maribeth Weber, a United flight attendant.

echo FAA's

Alaska overhauled

By Blake Morrison and Alan Le
 USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — An audit Alaska Airlines shows significant understaffed maintenance, safety operations, poor employee morale, and policies and procedures in need of an overhaul.

Echoing concerns by federal regulators who last month contemplated shutting down the airline's maintenance facilities, the audit so found that officials of one of West Coast's major carriers had made safety a high enough priority.

Conducted in April and May made public today, the company findings come more than months after an Alaska jet crashed Jan. 31 off the coast of California killed all 88 people aboard, spurring the Federal Aviation months of bad publicity.

However, Alaska officials and firm hired to conduct the audit last week they found no evidence to line let any unsafe jet leave the company officials say, the findings nation's 10th largest airline changes, including hiring at least. "Nobody alleged poor quality safe practices here," says Bill and chief operating officer. Even the audit as "an opportunity" for safety.

John Enders, president of the audit conducted the Alaska audit, found by his team might have been but Alaska officials "stepped in" they became safety problems.

Still, aviation safety experts tied in the audit are serious.

"To jump to a conclusion that it was an unsafe aircraft, I don't think 100%," says Michael Barr, director of the program at the University of

The audit found that the airline's way it allowed jets to fly equipment was not working, adding employees in different training. Enders' positives, including a motivation problems resulted from managers' concerns, the audit's

Last month, an FAA audit of the airline's fleet. FAA officials had threatened heavy-maintenance facilities, grounded as many as seven jets company's fleet of 89. But after plan submitted by the airline, allow the company to continue stronger oversight by FAA inspectors.

Alaska has been stung by a crash to its Oakland maintenance facility mechanics that their safety could be headed. The airline denies any

The accident appears linked component in the jet's tail, but determined why it failed.

When asked why the airline's attention for safety, had apparently previous audits had not

Flight attendants demand tougher rules to fight

By Salina Khan
 USA TODAY

Flight attendants will descend on airports and government offices around the world today to demand tougher rules against unruly passengers.

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Tuesday, a Continental Airlines flight was forced to return to Anchorage when a passenger hurled a can of beer at a flight attendant. The first officer left the cockpit to help and was

hand out fliers at Chicago O'Hare, San Francisco, Miami and Fort Lauderdale airports.

The proposal also is being taken to officials at the Department of Transportation and FAA.

Elsewhere:

► Union members will present the proposal to government officials in Montreal, Brussels, Paris and London.

British Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott is expected to pledge his support for an international treaty to allow

► Incidents of unruly passengers are on the rise, according to the Department of Transportation.

► In the past, flight attendants have been trained to deal with unruly passengers by using physical force.

► In some cases, flight attendants have been injured by unruly passengers.

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The absence of nature is risky

Continued from 1A

munologist at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel. "If it doesn't get the right kind of practice, it develops imperfectly."

The hygiene hypothesis implies what many historians have come to believe: that our problems with allergies began not when mankind entered the garden but when mankind was banished from it. And this exile began, not in biblical times, but in the 1800s during the Industrial Revolution.

The hypothesis represents an attempt to explain a troubling increase in allergy and asthma in developed nations. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has reported that asthma rates in the USA have increased by 75% since 1980, with cases in children during the same period mushrooming by as much as 160%.

No one knows why, but scores of researchers are vying to find out. "It's a fashionable subject," says Philippa Marrack of the National Jewish Medical and Research Center in Denver.

Marrack, one of the world's leading immunologists, illustrates her point with an impromptu search of recent medical literature. In the past three years, she says, scientists have published more than 6,000 research reports examining the apparent links between civilized living and allergies and asthma.

Is house dust good for you?

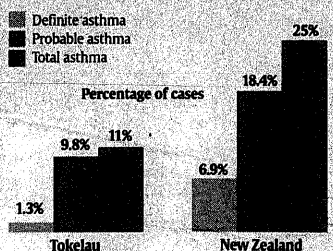
Although many doctors suspect that excessive cleanliness might play a role in the upsurge of allergies, they don't recommend that people throw away the soap or dump the vacuum cleaner bag on the carpet — at least, not yet. "We don't quite have the smoking gun," Marrack says. "But we're close."

For parents wondering whether they should let their kids romp in a barnyard or hide them from germs, Marrack says: "There's probably a middle way, but we don't know what it is, a middle way between locking a child in an aluminum shed and exposing the child to lots of germs. There's some reasonable middle ground here, which is what people do anyway."

Driving the research explosion is an even more ba-

Asthma: The impact of moving from a primitive island to a developed one

A study comparing asthma prevalence in Tokelauan children who remained on Tokelau with that of Tokelauan children who have moved to New Zealand:



Source: Blackwell Scientific Publications By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

sic question: How does the immune system distinguish "self," the proteins that are made in the body, from "non-self," the proteins that are not? How does it learn which ones represent a threat to survival and which do not?

If researchers can answer these questions, they could learn not only to prevent allergic disease, they could begin to harness the immune system to fight a host of diseases, including cancer.

A study led by one of Marrack's colleagues, Andy Liu, offers the most intriguing evidence yet that the best protection against allergy or asthma might be exposure to a bacterial molecule in house dust.

The molecule, known as endotoxin, occurs naturally in every bacterium's outer envelope. Thus, endotoxin is released into the environment any time bacteria die.

"Early childhood exposure to endotoxin may be the common thread in communities where asthma and allergies are uncommon," says Liu, whose study appeared in the May 11 issue of the journal *Lancet*.

Endotoxin somehow protects

Liu's team studied the homes of 61 infants from 9 months to 2 years old. All the children were tested for sensitivity to dust mite, cat, dog, cockroach, mouse, milk, egg and soy. Doctors also determined the endotoxin concentrations in each house by testing house

dust collected from the child's bed, a couch, and floors in the living room, kitchen and bedroom.

Of these children, 51 tested negative for sensitivity to those irritants. Moreover, they had the highest concentrations of endotoxin in their homes, suggesting that exposure to endotoxin somehow protects against allergic disease.

"The study supports the thesis that exposure to endotoxin early on has an impact on the subsequent development of the immune system," says David Sacks, a parasitologist at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.

Marrack asserts, however, that it will take many more studies to furnish proof. "Studies of this type are usually done multiple times before the medical establishment makes up its mind," she says. "It's a beginning."

A matter of immunity

Liu says he decided to test for endotoxin because a flurry of recent studies suggested that people in rural areas are less likely to develop allergies or asthma than people living in cities. Those studies included:

► An analysis of the prevalence of asthma in 1,375 urban and rural children from the Xhosa tribe in southern Africa. More than 3% of the city-dwelling Xhosa children had asthma, compared with 0.14% of rural children.

► An assessment of asthma prevalence in children living on the Pacific atolls of Tokelau and in Tokelauan children living in New Zealand, a more modern environment. Only 11% of the 706 Tokelauan children living on their home atolls had asthma, compared with 25% of Tokelauan children living in New Zealand.

► A study in Basel, Switzerland, showed that children of part-time farmers had a 76% higher risk of hay fever and allergy than those of full-time farmers, suggesting that the greater exposure to livestock and the farm environment can be more protective.

Although endotoxin is found in high concentrations in nature, Liu says, it's also found in urban settings because bacteria are everywhere. Moreover, researchers had previously demonstrated that endotoxin can prime the immune system to respond to allergy-causing substances.

To understand how this occurs, consider the workings of the immune system.

More than just the sum of its parts, the immune system is a highly coordinated network of millions of white blood cells that attack and kill invading microbes. At the top of the heap are T cells, specialized

white blood cells that are capable of distinguishing self from non-self and coordinating the human immune response.

T cells come in many varieties. Some act as dispatchers, squirting out potent signaling molecules that can activate and deactivate other immune cells. Some T cells are capable of killing virus-infected cells. Without T cells, no one could survive for very long. Witness the effect of AIDS, caused by a virus that kills T cells.

Allergy, too, is a T-cell disorder, but it is very different from AIDS. Allergy might best be thought of as a case of arrested T-cell development.

At birth, the immune system relies on T cells to block deadly germs from so much as entering the body's cells — by generating a set of immune responses that also happens to drive allergic responses to foreign proteins.

Later in life, the immune response changes dramatically, and T cells develop the ability to attack cells even after they have been infected. This set of responses depends on practice, which comes from exposure to the proper foreign proteins at the appropriate stage of immune development.

"It's like the brain," says Cohen of the Weizmann Institute. "If a child doesn't get the proper visual or auditory input at the proper time of life, he'll have a speech or hearing problem, even if the brain is normal."

'Being protective' has saved lives

Cohen has become one of the more outspoken advocates of a radical notion that immune deprivation might also lead to autoimmune diseases, such as multiple sclerosis or early-onset diabetes.

Although many researchers dispute this, arguing that infections can tilt the immune system toward self-destructive, autoimmune responses, Cohen says his evidence suggests the opposite.

"The more mice are protected from (microbial) contamination, the higher their incidence of autoimmune diseases," he says.

Most privileged children nowadays get far fewer serious infections than they did two centuries ago. Vaccinations, antibiotics and better sanitation have virtually done away with plague, typhoid fever, cholera, diphtheria and polio. Smallpox, once a harrowing rite of passage for almost everyone, has been eradicated.

That's a good thing, doctors say, even if it leaves people susceptible to immune imbalances later in life. "What we're seeing now may be a consequence of being too protective," Marrack says. "But being protective has kept a lot of children alive."

Colo. considers urging schools to post motto

Supporters want to display 'In God we trust' as guide

By Steven K. Paulson
The Associated Press

DENVER — In another dispute over the role of religion in public schools, the Colorado Board of Education plans to consider whether to display "In God we trust" in schools.

Supporters say they want students to be reminded of moral standards. They also say they believe the courts cannot object to a phrase that appears on U.S. currency.

Opponents, however, say the phrase is a veiled attempt to reintroduce religion in schools in the wake of past failures. Earlier this year, the Colorado Legislature refused to require schools to post the Ten Commandments. And last month, the U.S. Supreme Court banned prayers at high school football games.

"I see this as part of a plan by the religious right," said Rabbi Steven Foster, a member of The Interfaith Alliance in Denver. "If they can't get the Ten Commandments, this year they will settle for 'In God we trust.'"

The measure, to be debated by the board today, is a

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RESORTS

WEST

| | THURS-SAT | SUN-WED |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Kapalua, HI | \$265 | \$265 |
| Laguna Niguel, CA | \$385 | \$285 |
| Rancho Mirage, CA | \$149 | \$109 |

INDONESIA

| | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| Bali | \$135 | \$135 |
|------|-------|-------|

SOUTHEAST

| | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|
| Amelia Island, FL | \$239 | \$175 |
| Naples, FL | \$200 | \$129 |
| Palm Beach, FL | \$159 | \$139 |

CARIBBEAN

| | | |
|------------|-------|-------|
| Cancun | \$149 | \$149 |
| San Juan | \$179 | \$179 |
| St. Thomas | \$189 | \$189 |

HOTELS

WEST

| | FRI-SUN | MON-THURS |
|--------------------|---------|-----------|
| Huntington, CA | | |
| (Pasadena) | \$169 | \$169 |
| Marina del Rey, CA | \$199 | \$219 |
| Phoenix, AZ | \$89 | \$129 |