

The simple truth is that in terms of health, Ebola is the story of the year. It's the world's first epidemic of Ebola. We've had Ebola outbreaks before, but never an epidemic, spreading widely across many countries for many months. The challenges are enormous and CDC is working around the clock devoting all of our resources to address this challenge. Fighting Ebola is a critical mission for CDC, but it's just one of the many challenges CDC took on in 2014 to protect the health of Americans. Every day, CDC professionals work with U.S. clinicians, for example, to protect the usefulness of antibiotics by improving infection control and antibiotic prescribing, today, so our antibiotics will still work for all of us tomorrow. When clusters of severe respiratory illness in children caused by Enterovirus D-68 appeared early this fall, scientists at CDC quickly responded and invented a newer, faster laboratory test to diagnose children more quickly. When the first United States cases of MERS, or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, hit in May, CDC professionals shored up the nation's lab testing capacity for MERS and provided guidance for health departments to find MERS, diagnose it and protect their communities, just in case. Through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, CDC scientists also helped support life-saving antiretroviral treatment for nearly eight million people, and supported HIV testing and counseling for almost 57 million people. These are individuals who, today, are alive, teaching, learning, working, raising children and who would otherwise be sick or dying without PEPFAR. And we're beginning to turn the tide on the HIV pandemic. In late March, the South East Asia Region of the World Health Organization - home to 1.8 billion people - was certified to be polio-free. Eighty percent of the world is now free from polio. That's a remarkable achievement. It seemed out of reach when CDC joined Rotary International, the World Health Organization and UNICEF to pursue eradication back in 1988. Two laboratory safety incidents this past year resulted in changes in CDC lab practice that will be used to strengthen safety here at CDC and in laboratories throughout the country and the world. Million Hearts, CDC's campaign to prevent heart attacks and stroke, encouraged widespread adoption and use of standard treatment protocols to improve blood pressure control. These simple steps help doctors, nurses and pharmacists prevent heart attacks, strokes and other serious complications of high blood pressure for their patients. CDC's "Tips From Former Smokers" campaign continued hard-hitting ads against smoking, showing the real impact of smoking on the lives of real Americans. Tobacco remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States and this campaign has already saved the lives of literally tens of thousands of Americans. Tens of thousands! And it's done so for a tiny fraction of the cost of other programs to have had a similar impact. CDC also worked to improve prescription drug monitoring systems so doctors and pharmacists can know what medicines a patient is taking and prevent deadly overdoses. Each mission is to protect and improve the health of Americans, our families, our communities, our country and people across the globe. Protecting health is our passion and it's what makes us feel so fortunate to do the work that we do. The dedicated, creative and resourceful public health professionals of CDC are looking forward to working 24/7 to protect Americans in 2015 and beyond.