

## Recent news from WHO

- Twenty-two African nations launched a coast-to-coast mass immunization campaign targeting 100 million children on **25 February** to stamp out polio by the end of the year. The booster campaign is vital to halt a re-emergence of the disease in countries that had been polio-free for several years. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia — which recently reported its first polio case in four years — and Eritrea on the southern and eastern edges of the epidemic are joining the campaign, as well as Côte d'Ivoire, which is rejoining the effort for the first time since civil unrest halted vaccinations last November.
- UN experts warned on **2 March** that acrylamide in some foods may be harmful and should be reduced, after researchers showed a link between the toxin, which can be produced by cooking certain foods at high temperature, and cancer in animals. Experts from the Joint Expert Committee of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and WHO concluded that the link between acrylamide in food and cancer in humans needed further study. The main foods contributing to acrylamide exposure in countries for which data were available are: potato chips, crisps, coffee, cereal-based products, pastries, sweet biscuits, bread and toast.
- WHO and UNICEF said on **4 March** that the number of deaths from measles, a highly infectious disease that can be prevented by vaccination, had fallen dramatically, with most reductions in Africa. The agencies said global measles deaths fell by 39%, from 873 000 in 1999 to an estimated 530 000 in 2003. The largest reduction was in Africa, the WHO region with the highest burden of measles and where estimated measles deaths decreased by 46% in that period. Measles remains an important cause of childhood death. Only a decade ago, it killed millions of children every year and affected 30 million more, leaving many with life-long disabilities such as blindness and brain damage.
- WHO appointed Ethiopian fashion model Liya Kebede (see picture) on **7 March** as Goodwill Ambassador for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health to raise public awareness and spur efforts to address the huge and largely preventable toll of maternal and child mortality. Kebede, who is herself a mother, joined WHO's campaign a month before World Health Day 2005 on 7 April and the release of the World health report 2005 both devoted to this subject. Kebede has appeared on the covers of American, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean and Spanish editions of fashion magazine, *Vogue*. She was recently voted model of the year in Asia.
- The President of Chile Ricardo Lagos Escobar and WHO Director-General LEE Jong-wook launched a new initiative on **18 March** to spur more action to tackle the factors causing ill-health, such as poverty, social status, job, gender and education. The Commission on the Social Determinants of Health will work for three years to produce recommendations on how governments can tackle these and other causes of ill-health. It will be chaired by Sir Michael Marmot, who is Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at the Royal Free and University College Medical School in London, and who has conducted extensive and high-profile research into the link between social factors and ill-health.

For more about these and other WHO news items please see: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/en/>



WHO/P. Wiggers

From catwalks to maternity wards, Ethiopian cover model Liya Kebede is appointed WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health.